ELEPHANTS

IN WAR AND VICTORY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMAN ELEPHANT WARFARE AND ITS INFLUENCE IN ELEPHANTS' ROLE IN ROMAN VICTORY CELEBRATONS

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tutkielmani käsittelee elefanttien asemaa ja sen kehitystä roomalaisessa sodankäynnissä ja voitonjuhlinnassa antiikin kirjallisten ja kuvallisten lähteiden pohjalta.

Roomalaiset kohtasivat elefantteja ensimmäisen kerran taistelussa Epeiroksen kuningas Pyrrhosta vastaan Herakleian taistelussa vuonna 280 eKr., ja olivat aluksi täysin voimattomia tätä uutta sodankäynnin muotoa vastaan. Sotanorsut olivat roomalaisten silmissä hirvittäviä petoja, vihollisia, jotka pelkällä ulkoisella olemuksellaan aiheuttivat sekasortoa ja paniikkia. Analysoin tutkielmassani millaisia erilaisia aseita ja taktiikoita roomalaiset kokeilivat ja käyttivät vihollistensa sotanorsujen torjumiseksi ja kuinka, vuodesta 200 eKr. alkaen, roomalaiset käyttivät elefantteja myös omissa joukoissaan, joskin elefanttien käyttö jäi roomalaisten osalta pienimuotoiseksi ja satunnaiseksi. Analysoin myös muutosta, joka tapahtui roomalaisten suhtautumisessa sotanorsuihin, kun heidän kokemuksensa elefanttien vastaisessa sodankäynnissä kasvoi ja kun he rupesivat käyttämään sotanorsuja omissakin joukoissaan.

Ensimmäiset elefantit, jotka tuotiin Roomaan tavallisen kansan nähtäville, olivat Pyrrhokselta vangittuja sotanorsuja, jotka Manius Curius Dentatus esitteli vuoden 275 eKr. triumfissaan sotavankeina. Dentatuksen triumfi oli samalla myös ensimmäinen triumfi, jossa esiteltiin roomalaisten näkökulmasta eksoottisia eläimiä. Työni elefantteja roomalaisessa voitonjuhlinnassa koskevassa osassa käsittelen aluksi elefanttien merkitystä voitonkulkueiden kehityksessä uskonnollisista puhdistautumisriiteistä kohti spektaakkelimaista voitonjuhlintaa. Koska elefantit olivat yleensä osallistuneet voitonjuhlintaa edeltävään sodankäyntiin taistelemalla joko roomalaisia vastaan, tullen vangituksi taistelussa, tai roomalaisten joukoissa, elefanttien rooli ja merkitys roomalaisissa voitonkulkueissa ja muissa voitonjuhlintaan liittyvissä spektaakkeleissa oli pelkkää eksoottista eläintä huomattavasti monimuotoisempi.

Analysoin tutkielmassani myös, miten ja millaisissa rooleissa elefantit esitettiin roomalaisessa voitonjuhlinnassa, ja miten muutos roomalaisten suhtautumisessa elefantteihin sodankäynnissä ja keisariajan voitonjuhlintaan tuomat muutokset vaikuttivat elefanttien roolin voitonjuhlinnassa. Elefanttien ollessa sodankäynnissä pelättyjä vihollisia ne esitettiin myös voitonjuhlinnassa voitettuina ja vangittuina vihollisina, ja samoin kuin taistelussa panikoiviin elefantteihin yhdistettiin ihmismäinen epäluotettavuuden piirre, myös voitonkulkueissa vankeina esiteltyjä elefantteja kuvattiin sangen inhimillisinä. Elefanttien sodankäynnissä aiheuttaman kauhun vähennyttyä ja roomalaisten otettua sotanorsuja omaankin käyttöönsä, elefantteja ei enää esitetty vihollisina eikä niiden kauheutta korostettu voitonjuhlinnassakaan. Sen sijaan elefantit ylenivät triumfaattorin saattajiksi korostamaan tämän jumalaisuutta.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords

African elephant, Asian elephant, elephant warfare, Pyrrhic War, Punic Wars, Persian Wars, Thapsus, Roman victory celebrations, triumph, ovation, venation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Appellitur atra
mole fera, et monstris componitur Itala pubes.[1]
The huge black beasts were brought up, and the sons of Italy were matched against monsters.

The Roman soldiers confronted war elephants for the first time in 280 BC when they fought against king Pyrrhus of Epirus near the town of Heraclea in Lucania. The Romans, who had never seen such beasts before, were thrown into confusion and disorder, and thus the battle ended in a Pyrrhic victory. Since that battle the Roman army developed and experimented with multiple ways to best counter and defeat their enemies' war elephants – ways that were put to the test especially during the Punic Wars. Since 200 BC the Romans occasionally had war elephants of their own.

The first elephants that were brought to the city of Rome and put on display for the Roman public were also war elephants: they had been captured in battle and were led as prisoners of war in the triumphal procession of Manius Curius Dentatus in 275 BC. Since their first appearance in a victory procession, elephants had a very special role in Roman victory celebrations and an important meaning to the development of Roman victory celebrations.

This study aspires to establish, based on surviving ancient accounts, how the Romans countered and used war elephants in battle, what was the role of elephants in Roman victory celebrations and how the development of elephants' role in warfare influenced and corresponded with their role and symbolic meaning in the victory celebrations. I have also aimed to compose a compendium of battles and victory celebration featuring elephants by collecting into two tables all the elephant battles and celebrations and their references in the ancient texts known to me. The time limits of this study are set by the first occurrence of elephants in battlefield against Romans in 280 BC and the last time, before the Byzantine time, they took part in a victory celebration in the late 4th century AD.

[1] Sil. *Pun*. 9.570–571.

The used source material is mainly literal, but also pictorial evidence has been taken to account where it contributes to the subject. The main sources of this study are Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae*, Florus's *Epitome de T. Livio Bellorum Omnium Annorum DCC Libri Duo*, Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita Libri*, Pliny's[2] *Naturalis Historia*, Pseudo-Caesar's[3] *Commentarii de Bello Africo*, the *Scriptores Historia Augusta* and Vegetius's *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, although all in all I have studied a much wider range of texts to get an encompassing view of the battles and victory celebrations elephant took part in. The relevant texts have been collected mainly by using the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* -reference works and by searching *The Digital Loeb Classical Library* -electronic database with headwords such as *elepha** and *ἐλέφα**, to cover both words *elephantus* and *elephas* and their declined forms. The selected texts have then been studied with regard also to other terms, such as *bos Luca*, *belua* and *monstrum*, with which elephants were frequently referred to in antiquity.[4]

I shall first explain, in chapter 2, what kind of elephants the elephants of the ancient world were and briefly present generally how elephants were weaponized and what kind of instruments of war they were. In chapter 3, I discuss Roman elephant warfare and its development. I do not aspire to present all ancient accounts of elephants in warfare nor to discuss every battle where elephants took part, for in case of many of the battles the accounts of elephants are only very brief and do not give any significant information of them besides that they were present. I examine the subject trough battles I have chosen as examples, because they address the matter of elephants more elaborately and give valuable information about different aspects of Roman elephant warfare.

In chapter 4, I first discuss what meaning elephants had in the development of various forms of Roman victory celebrations. After that I examine, in the same manner as in the previous chapter, elephants' role and purpose and their development in Roman victory processions and other victory related spectacles.

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[2] All mentions of Pliny in this study refer to Pliny the Elder and all mention of Seneca refer to Seneca the Younger.
[3] *Commentarii de Bello Africo* was published in the name of Gaius Julius Caesar, but the language and style of the work indicate that Caesar did not in fact write it. Aulus Hirtius, one of Caesars officers, to whom the eighth book of Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* has commonly been distributed, has been suggested as one possible writer to the *de Bello Africo.* Suetonius (*Iul*. 56.1.) for one comment the matter thus: "*nam Alexandrini Africique et Hispaniensis incertus auctor est: alii Oppium putant, alii Hirtium, qui etiam Gallici belli nouissimum imperfectumque librum suppleuerit.*" (Way 1964, vii-ix.)
[4] For the terms used of elephants by the Romans, see chapter 2.1. *Loxodonta* and *Elephas*.

2. ELEPHANTS IN ANTIQUITY

2.1. *Loxodonta* and *Elephas*

> *Indicum africi pavent nec contueri audent, nam et maior indicis magnitudo est.*[5]
>
> African [elephants] are terrified of the Indian [elephant] and do not dare to even look upon it, because the Indians are greater in size.

As Pliny's statement indicates, both two genera of elephants, the African elephant (genus *Loxodonta*) and the Asian elephant (genus *Elephas*), were known in the antiquity. Their most notable characteristic differences[6] were recognised in both literary sources and pictorial representations. The distinction can be noted especially in representations dating to Rome's republican time. During the imperial time the characteristics of the two genera began to merge in Roman art so that often the pictured elephants have features of both *Loxodonta* and *Elephas*. Reason to the precision of the republican representations is most likely due to the Romans associating

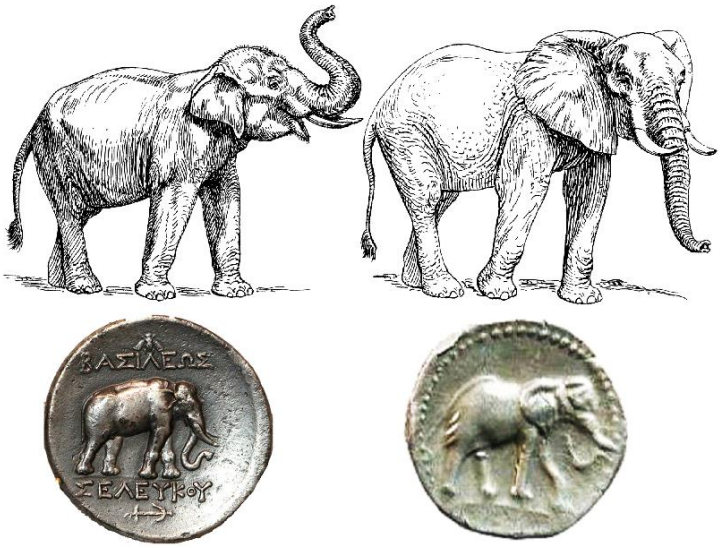

Fig. 1. An Asian elephant (left) illustrated and pictured on the reverse of a Seleucid coin (ESM 626). An African elephant (right) illustrated and pictured on the reverse of a Punic coin (SNG BM Spain 98).
(Coins and illustrations: Wikimedia Commons)

[5] Plin. *nat*. 8.9.27.

[6] The main differences in appearance between the African and Asian elephants can be listed as follows: 1) the Asian elephant has relatively small ears compared to those of the African elephant, which covers the shoulders and exceeds in height the elephant's neck. 2) The back of the Asian elephant is either level or convex so that the elephant's highest point is at the top of its head, whereas the African elephant's back is concave and head set lower so that its highest point is at the top of its shoulder. 3) The Asian elephant has only one "finger" at the end of its trunk, the African elephant has two. 4) Both cows and bulls of the African elephant have tusks whereas usually only Asian elephant males are tusked. (Scullard 1974, 23; Shoshani 2006, 7.)

elephants at that time primarily with warfare and enemy nations. Therefor it was indeed relevant whether the pictured elephants were Asian, like the elephants king Pyrrhus of Epirus had, or African, like the Carthaginian war elephants. [7]

Besides pointing out that both African and Asian elephants were known to the Romans, Pliny makes a curious claim of the Asian elephant being the larger one of the two. It is a claim to which the other ancient writers, who address the matter, virtually unanimously join and which verifies that the Sub-Saharan savannah elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), which we nowadays most commonly perceive as the African elephant, was not known in the ancient world. The African elephant the ancient writers are referring to is a smaller species of the genus *Loxodonta*, which lived north of the Sahara.[8]

The taxonomy of this species has been debated by both zoologists and classical scholars and is not yet with certitude resolved. The main suggestions are that the elephants were either ancestors of the still living species of African forest elephant[9] (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) or a nowadays extinct species of the forest elephant (*Loxodonta pharaohensis*). Both the *cyclotis* and the *pharaohensis* are indeed of smaller size than the Asian elephant as the average height of a forest elephant is 2–3 meters and weight 2000–4500 kilograms compared to the average height of 2–3,5 meters and weight of 2000–5500 kilograms of the Asian elephant.[10] Sukumar, objects that it is not likely that the *Loxodonta cyclotis* had spread all the way to the Red Sea region and the Horn of Africa, where the Ptolemies for one obtained their elephants, while research on genetic evidence from living African elephants, indicates that the *Loxodonta pharaohensis* was indeed present both in the Red Sea and the Atlas Mountain area, where the Carthaginians obtained their war elephants. Csuti suggests that the matter could possibly be solved by doing further genetic research on subfossil specimens, such as ancient ivory artefacts.[11]

The taxonomy of the Asian elephant in antiquity is more straightforward: there is nowadays and was in antiquity only one living species (*Elephas maximus*) of this genus. The Asian elephants

[7] Toynbee 1973, 33.
[8] The region was formerly considerably moister and more vegetated, and the elephants originally ranged all across North Africa. (Csuti 2006, 16)
[9] In most of the previous studies African forest elephants are referred to as *Loxodonta africana cyclotis* and *Loxodonta africana pharaohensis* and the savannah elephant as *Loxodonta africana africana*, because African forest elephants were previously considered to be a subspecies of the African savannah elephant.
[10] Csuti 2006, 8. In comparison: the average height of an African savannah elephant is 3–4 meters and weight 4000–7000 kilograms.
[11] Csuti 2006, 16–17; Deraniyagala 1955, 28; Sukumar 2006, 85–87.

are exceedingly attached to their areas of living, and thus formation of subspecies restricted to different areas is relatively easy, but the differences between them are not big enough to be of any real significance in a study that is not zoological.[12]

In the Latin language there are four words literally referring to elephant: *elephantus*, *elephas* (sometimes also *elephans*), *barrus* and *bos Luca*. The most commonly used of these are *elephantus* and *elephas.* They are both derived from the Greek word *ἐλέφας*, which, according to Isidorus, the 7th century scholar and bishop of Seville, was derived from the word *λόφος*, meaning e.g. a ridge, dome, hill or crest, alluding to elephants' great size. The word *barrus* is, according to Isidorus, Indian in origin and refers to the trumpeting sound (*barritus*) elephants make.[13] It is rarely used, occurring only in a few surviving ancient sources, the first surviving mention being in one of Horace's (65–8 BC) epodes and the next mentions in the grammar of Marius Victorinus (c. AD 285–365), in a poem by Sidonius Apollinaris (c. AD 340–485) and in a poem by an unknown author, preserved in the *Anthalogia Latina* (compiled in the 6th century).[14] The name *bos Luca*, "Lucanian cow", is Roman in its origin. It is the name with witch the Romans called elephants when they saw them for the first time with Pyrrhus' army in Lucania. The Romans mistook the unknown tusked beasts for strange kind of oxen because bovines were the biggest animals they knew of.[15] The name is not very frequently used, but an inscription, dating to AD 198–209, of a votive dedication of two tusks of a Lucanian cow to Liber Pater, found from *Forum Vetus* at Lepcis Magna, indicates that it preserved in use.[16]

2.2. Elephants as instruments of war

Both African and Asian elephants were used in battle. Due to their greater size the Asian elephants were regarded as better suited for war, but whether the ancient armies used African or Asian elephants was not based on the size of the animals but on where they could most easily obtain

[12] Deraniyagala 1955, 116.
[13] Isid. *orig*. 12.2.14. Also *stridor* was used for the trumpeting of elephants.
[14] Anth. Lat. 195.3; Hor. *epod*. 12.1; Mar. Victor. *gramm*. VI 10.1; Sidon. *carm*. 23.56. Let it be mentioned, though, that the word *barrus* is listed in several early medieval glossaries (*CGL II* 295.8; *CGL III* 189.42; *CGL V* 348.14, 401.28, 442.29, 492.37, 549.49, 562.30, 57).
[15] Isid. *orig*. 12.2.15.
[16] IRT 295: "(…) *dentes duos Lucae bouis Indorum tuorum dico*."

them. Hence, Pyrrhus led Asian elephants against the Romans, whereas the Carthaginians had African elephants. Likewise, bull elephants were preferred to the cows because they are more temperamental, but both sexes were used as war elephants.[17]

The idea and knowledge of using elephants as instruments of war was introduced to the Mediterranean world by Seleucus I Nicator. When serving as a general in Alexander the Greats army, Seleucus had been so greatly impressed by the war elephants king Porus of India had used in the battle of Hydaspes (326 BC) that when he had established the Seleucid kingdom after Alexander's death, he obtained from India a great number of elephants for his own army. Encountering Seleucus' war elephants in battle got king Pyrrhus inspired of elephants' military potential, and it was he who in 280 BC introduced elephant warfare to the Romans. The Romans were not equally quick to take interest in the use of war elephants. They captured elephants from their enemies when they could and developed multiple ways of countering them in battle but did not have them in their own ranks before 200 BC.[18]

War elephants were not tamed animals. Each elephant was made willing to submit to a rider[19] (*rector*, *regens, magister, indicus* [20]), who had raised and trained the elephant, thus creating a bond of trust with it. Every elephant was controlled on the battlefield by its own mahout, who rode on the elephant's neck. An elephant could not function as a war elephant without its mahout.[21]

Fig. 2. A Punic coin (SNG BM Spain 97) showing on its reverse a mahout guiding his elephant with a goad. (Wikimedia Commons)

[17] Head 1982, 50; Kistler 2006, 69; Plin. *nat*. 8.9.27: "*Elephantorum generis feminae multo pavidiores*".
An interesting setback of using female elephants in battle is mentioned by Florus (*epit.* 1.13.12–13), who tells that during the battle of Maleventum (275 BC) a female elephant of the Pyrrhic army turned away from the fighting to rush to the aid of its wounded cub. By so doing the female caused such a havoc to its own ranks that it turned the battle into a Roman victory.
[18] Glover 1948, 2–3; Gowers 1947, 42.
[19] Usually referred to by its Indian name, *mahout*, in modern studies.
[20] The art of training elephants for war had already long traditions in India at the time war elephants were introduced to the Mediterranean world. Because of the Indians' vast experience in training and riding war elephants, Indian mahouts were undoubtedly in the first instance transported with the elephants to the Mediterranean – hence they were called *indicus*. Later the word *indicus* became established in the meaning of elephant riders and was used to refer also to mahouts that were not Indian. (Gowers 1947, 43)
[21] Anglim et al. 2002, 125–126; Gowers 1947, 43.
A good indication of how important the mahouts were in controlling their elephants is that at the end of the battle of Panormus (251 BC) Lucius Caecilius Metellus offered pardon to those of the captured enemy mahouts, who would hold the captured war elephants in check. (Zon. 8.14.)

Mahouts controlled their elephants both with their voice and by pressing or hitting the nerve centres on the elephant's head and shoulders with their feet or with a hooked goad (*harpe*, *custis*). Hitting these sensitive spots causes an elephant, for example, to move forward, rise its trunk, trumpet or kneel as a flex action. A few sources report, the mahouts being equipped also with tools to slay their elephant if it became uncontrollable. Livy describes them as carpenter's chisel and a mallet:

> *Fabrile scalprum cum malleo habebant; id, ubi saeuire beluae ac ruere in suos coeperant, magister inter aures positum ipsa in compage qua iungitur capiti ceruix, quanto maximo poterat ictu adigebat. Ea celerrima uia mortis in tantae molis belua inuenta erat ubi regendi spem ui uicissent, primusque id Hasdrubal instituerat* (…).[22]
>
> They [mahouts] had a carpenter's chisel and a mallet; when the beasts began raging and rushing into their own ranks, the mahouts placed the chisel between the ears [of the elephant], in the joint which attaches the heat to the neck and impels it with as great a blow as he is able to. This is the quickest way invented to kill a beast of such a great bulk when the hope of controlling them is defeated by their strength, and the first to establish this practice was Hasdrubal.

Ammianus Marcellinus in turn tells that at the battle of Maranga (AD 363) the mahouts had for the same purpose a knife (*culter*) bound to their right hand.[23] Along with these tools to guide and control their elephant, mahouts were usually armed only for self-defence, as their purpose was not to engage in the battle personally.[24]

The main use of elephants in war can be divided in three categories: firstly, they were psychological weapons that could with their mere appearance have a great effect on the moral of the enemy forces.[25] Elephants were especially effective in neutralizing and scattering enemy cavalry, because horses that were not familiar with elephants could not stand the site, smell and sound of them but panicked and became unmanageable when they were approached by elephants. Secondly, elephants were used to attack enemy infantry breaking their lines and killing

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[22] Liv. 27.49.1–2.
Livy's description concerns the battle of Metaurus (207 BC). This seemingly witty countermeasure against elephants trampling their own troops, became quite absurd at Metaurus as the Carthaginians ended up killing more of their own war elephants than the Romans.

[23] Amm. 25.1.15: "*Quibus insidentes magistri manubriatos cultros dexteris manibus inligatos gestabant* (…) *et si ferociens animal vires exuperasset regentis, ne reversum per suos* (…) *conlisam sterneret plebem, vertebram, quae caput a cervice disterminat, ictu maximo terebrabant*."

[24] Anglim et al. 2002, 126.

[25] This was a usual effect evoked by new weaponry. For example, Vegetius (*mil*. 3.24.1) states that the scythed chariots, which were afterwards laughed at, caused much alarm at first, when they were a novelty. The elephants' psychological value was not only in terrifying the enemy but also in encouraging their own troops. Sallust (*Iug*. 53.3.), for example, tells that during the battle of Muthul the Numidians stood their ground against the Romans only so long as they thought that they were protected by their elephants.

their soldiers by crushing them with their enormous bodies, impaling them with their tusks or striking or strangling them with their trunk.[26] Thirdly, the elephants served as high and movable shooting posts for archers, slingers and javelin men. Livy claims that at the battle of Magnesia (190 BC) war elephants had carried as many as four soldiers in addition to their mahout.[27]

Besides these main functions ancient sources mention that war elephants could be used also, for example, to breach enemy fortresses and to aid soldiers in river-crossings by standing in line in the river and thus breaking the current.[28] Elephants could also be useful to a marching army as beasts of burden. Marching on easy terrain a full-grown elephant can carry over 200kg.[29]

The use of elephants in war had also some significant disadvantages, and the true value of elephants as weapons has been debated since the ancient times. Firs of all, the training of war elephants was an exceedingly long process. As elephants are notoriously hard to breed in captivity, they were captured from the wild as younglings, usually before the age of five.[30] Their training began forthwith, but for actual military training they were not ready before the age of ten, and for battle they were ready only after they had reached their full sizes approximately at the age of twenty. Such a long training required a considerable investment of time and money from the military, and consequently many war elephants were not sufficiently trained.[31] If inadequately trained war elephants could prove to be rather unreliable weapons. The biggest problem in using elephants in battle is that they are not naturally belligerent animals. If they get injured or frightened their inherent reaction is to flee rather than fight, which naturally presents a problem in battle, especially because elephants are gregarious animals, and therefore, if one elephant stampedes the others follow.[32]

Elephants caused also many logistical complications to the army. Elephants' requirement of food, for instance, is enormous because their digestive system can use less than half of the food

[26] Deraniyagala 1955, 61–62; Kistler 2006, 65.
[27] Liv. 37.40.4; Scullard 1974, 180, 242–243.
[28] Glover 1948, 8–9. Breaking fortresses: Aristot. *hist. an*. 9.1.610a. Aiding in river-crossing: Liv. 21.47.4.
[29] Glover 1948, 9–10; Kistler 2006, 230.
[30] Ancient sources are not entirely unanimous regarding whether elephants were bred in Italy or not. For instance, Juvenal (12.101–104) says that elephants could not be bred in Italy, Aelian (*nat.* 2.11) claims the opposite. It is possible that a few elephant calves were occasionally born in captivity, but as breeding elephants in captivity is very hard even nowadays, it is doubtful that people in antiquity would have been able to breed elephants in such an extent that the massive need of them, for both war and entertainment, could have been sated. An account of different ways elephants were captured from the wild is given, for example, by Pliny (*nat*. 8.8.24–25).
[31] Kistler 2006, 68–69, 82. Gabriel 2011, 33.
[32] For example, the Seleucids tried to overcome their war elephants' natural timidity by drugging them with wine before going to battle. (Head 1982, 49)

they eat.[33] In the wild elephants spend up to 80% of their activity in feeding. Aristotle claims that an elephant requires on average six or seven Macedonian *medimni* of fodder and five *medimni* of wheat (together approximately 572–624 litres), as well as 22 Macedonian *metretae* (about 858 litres) of water a day.[34] According to modern studies of elephants' diet an elephant requires daily approximately 75–150 kg food and 80–160 litres of water a day. This means that the elephant cavalry of 80 elephants the Carthaginians had at the battle of Zama, would have need up to about 6000–12 000 kg of food and about 12 800 litres of water daily. Thankfully, elephants' diet is very versatile and adaptable depending on what food is available to them.[35] Transportation of a large number of animals as big as elephants, as well as their food, even though a big part of it must have been obtained through foraging and by letting the elephants graze, was problematic also because the longer the column of a marching army became the greater was the time taken on the march and the harder passing signals to the various units of the army became.

2.2.1. Equipment

The equipment war elephants were fitted with was mainly protective or decorative, the purpose of which was to make the elephants look even more intimidating. Elephants' immense size, tusks and trunk, as well as their unusual smell were weapons enough, though Silius Italicus, describe blades (*hasta*) having been fastened to elephants' tusks.[36] Unfortunately, albeit elephants are in several instances mentioned wearing armour, the ancient sources are not particularly elaborate in describing what kind of armour that was. However, by combining the literary accounts with pictorial evidence it can be concluded that the war elephants the Romans encountered in battle had at least some body armour and a head-piece (*frontalia*) protecting the animal's forehead, crown and upper trunk. Livy and Ammianus Marcellinus describe that at least at the battles of

[33] Dierenfeld 2006, 58; Scullard 1974, 20. This means that in addition to the huge amount of food and water the army needed to be able to provide to their elephants, the amount of excrements they had to deal with was enormous. One elephant defecates approximately 75-400 kilograms ordure and on average 50 litres urine daily. For example, the 80 war elephants the Carthaginian army had at Zama would thus have produced up to 32 tons ordure and on average 4000 litres urine a day. (Dumonceaux 2006, 302; Miller 2006, 389.)
[34] Aristot. *hist. an*. 7.9; Balme 1991, 545.
[35] Mac Donald 2001, 438.
[36] Sil. *Pun*. 9.581–3: "*Stat niueis longum stipata per agmina uallum/ dentibus, atque ebori praefixa comminus hasta/ fulget ab incuruo derecta cacumine cuspis*."

Magnesia (190 BC) and Maranga (AD 363), the head-pieces were decorated with crests (*crista*), which Ammianus portrays being terrifying (*cristarum a horrore*). Florus describes that the Seleucid war elephants at the battle of Magnesia were gleaming with gold, purple, silver and their own ivory. The silver and gold refer most likely to an ornate armour, the purple could be describing the crests.[37]

To protect a war elephant's body the most frequently used form of armour was the so-called scale mail (*lorica squamata*). Scale mail worn by the war elephants differed from that worn by human soldiers: the scales were directed upwards instead of downwards, because attacks against the elephants came from below. The problem in armouring a war elephant is that elephants overheat quite easily, especially if covered all over with heat-trapping metal.[38] To further protect the elephants, especially their feet, light armed troops were often placed between the elephants.

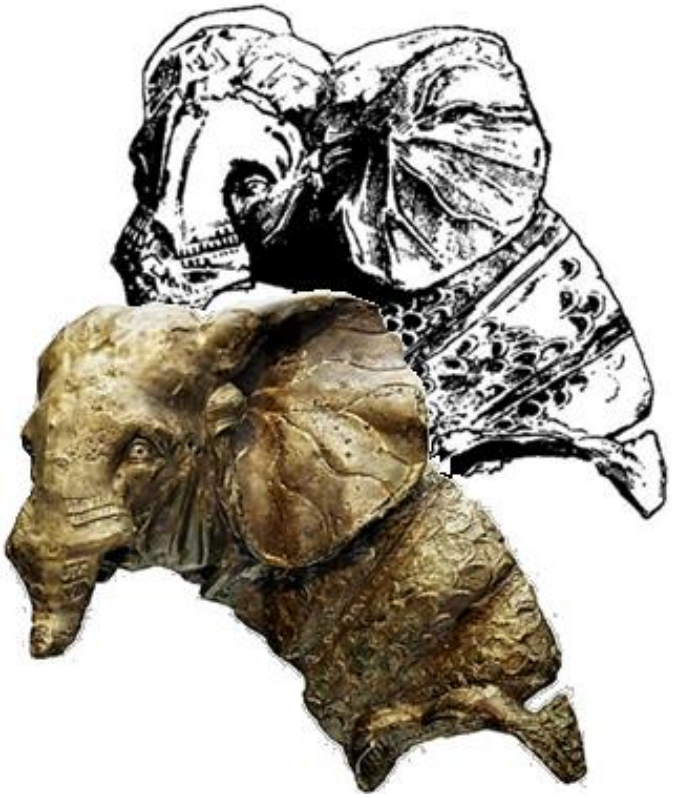

Fig. 3. A bronze sculpture (Wikimedia Commons) found in Etruria and an illustration of it (Daremberg–Sagliom 1892, s.v. 'Elephas') showing a war elephant wearing a *frontalia* on its forehead and *lorica squamata* to protect its body.

To protect the soldiers riding the elephant, at least the larger Asian elephants were at times equipped with turrets (*turres*). It has been debated whether the African elephants ever carried, or even were capable of carrying, in addition to the weight of the soldiers and the mahout, turrets in battle. Silius Italicus describes in his epic poem *Punica* the Carthaginian war elephants, which were of the African kind, having been fitted with turrets at the battles of Trebia (218 BC), Cannae (216 BC) and Zama (202 BC).[39] Livy though, who is credited as being Silius' main historical

[37] Amm. 25.3.12; Flor. *epit.* 1.24.16; Liv. 37.40.4.

[38] Kistler 2006, 21–22; Nossov 2008, 23.
It should be kept in mind that the reticulations elephants are often covered with in Roman art do not represent armour but are the standard convention for representing the wrinkles of elephants' skin. (Toynbee 1973, 29.)

[39] Trebia: *Pun*. 4.598–599, Cannae: *Pun*. 9.237–241, Zama: *Pun*. 17.619–621. No other sources mention war elephants, with or without turrets, in the battle of Cannae.

source, does not mention turrets on the Punic elephants in any battle, although he includes them when describing the Asian elephants of the Seleucids. Most scholars opine that Silius added turrets to his description of the Punic elephants just to make them seem more formidable in his poem.[40] Another mention of turreted Carthaginian war elephants is made by Lucretius in his poem *De rerum natura*, but the context of his statement is rhetorical, so it offers no reliable evidence.[41]

A more reliable indication of African elephants carrying turrets is given in the pseudo-Caesarian *Commentarii de Bello Africo*. The African elephants Quintus Caecilius Metellus Scipio had with his troops during his campaign against Gaius Julius Caesar are described bearing turrets when Scipio arranged his troops in battle formation, trying to coax Caesar into fighting at Ruspina.[42] Later, when the two armies did engage in combat near the city of Thapsus, no turrets are mentioned on the elephants. The turrets are mentioned again after the battle, when Caesar paraded the elephants he had captured in front of the city of Thapsus.[43] It is possible that the elephants did not, for one reason or another, have turrets in the actual battle and that afterwards Caesar dressed them in armour just to make the citizens of Thapsus even more impressed and intimidated.[44] Regardless, it would confirm that African elephants were indeed capable of carrying turrets.

[40] Charles 2008, 345.
[41] Lucr. 5.1302–4.
[42] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 30.2, 41.2–3.
[43] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 86.1.
[44] Charles 2008, 345.

3. ELEPHANTI IN PROELIUM ACTI

3.1. Elephant warfare in the republican time

The use of war elephants in the Mediterranean world was at its peak during the Roman republican era, when the Romans verily encountered elephants in 29 battles and had them in their own ranks eight times. Most notably war elephants were used during the Pyrrhic, Punic, Macedonian and Seleucid wars and in the decisive battle of Caesar's civil war.[45]

During the **Pyrrhic war** (280–275 BC) the Romans fought against Asian war elephants of king Pyrrhus in the battles of Heraclea (280 BC), Asculum (279 BC) and Maleventum[46] (275 BC).

The Carthaginians used African elephants[47] against the Romans during the **first Punic war** (264–241 BC) in the battles of Agrigentum (262 BC), Torus Hill (262 BC), Adys (255 BC), Bagradas (255 BC) and Panormus (c. 251 BC), during the **second Punic war** (218–202 BC) in the battles of:

Trebia (218 BC)	Aurinx (213 BC)	Grumentum (207 BC)
Nola (215 BC)	Himera (211 BC)	Metaurus (207 BC)
Hibera (215 BC)	Capua (211 BC)	Ilipa (206 BC)
Iliturgi (215 BC)	Numistro (210 BC)	Insubria (203 BC)
Intibili (215 BC)	Canusium (209 BC)	Zama (202 BC)
Munda (213 BC)	Baecula (208 BC)	

and during the **third Punic war** (149–146 BC) in the battle of Nepheris (147 BC).

During the **second Macedonian war** (200–197 BC) African elephants were used by the Romans in the battle of Cynoscephalae (197 BC), and during the **third Macedonian war** (172–168 BC) in the

[45] For the complete list of elephant battles, see Appendix 1: Table of battles featuring elephants.
[46] The Romans changed the name of the city to Beneventum when they founded a colony there in 268 BC. (OCD s.v. 'Beneventum')
[47] It has been argued by some scholars that the Carthaginians would have had also a few Asian elephants. This argument is largely based on Pliny's reference to Cato the Elder's *Annales*, where the bravest of the Carthaginian elephants is told having been named Surus, standing for "the Syrian". (Charles 2008, 342; Plin. *nat*. 8.5.11.)

battles of Phalanna (171 BC) and Pydna (168 BC).

During the **Seleucid war** (192–189 BC) the Romans fought against Antiochus III's Asian elephants in the battle of Magnesia (190 BC), and had African elephants in their own ranks in the battle of Thermopylae (191 BC).

During **Caesar's civil war** (49–46 BC) the optimates, led by Quintus Caecillius Metellus Scipio, used African elephants against Caesar in the battle of Thapsus (46 BC).

Many of the ancient accounts concerning the use of war elephants are very brief, stating only, for instance, where the elephants were placed in the battle line, or how many elephants were killed or captured during or after the battle. Therefore, concerning many battles we have no knowledge in what manner the elephants were used or if they remained in reserve behind the lines without joining the actual fighting. In this chapter Roman elephant warfare and its development during the republican time shall be discussed by regarding some battles of which we have more elaborate accounts regarding war elephants.

However, before that, one of the battles in which the use of elephants is unclear is worth of mentioning: during his second invasion of Britain (54 BC), Caesar was faced with resistance from the British king Cassivellaunus, while trying to cross over the river Theme. According to Polyaenus, he ordered a very large elephant, armoured with scale mail and carrying on its back a turret with archers and slingers, to enter the river first. The Britons and their horses, having never before seen an elephant, were so terrified of the sight that they turned into flight living the Romans to cross the river in peace.[48] The problem with Polyaenus' account is that Caesar fails to make any mention of an elephant in Britain in his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*. Some scholars have suggested that Polyaenus might have used as his source an annual dispatch from Caesar to the senate, where the elephant would have been mentioned, although later Caesar decided to omit it from his writings. Still Polyaenus' statement is most often deemed to be erroneous. Indeed, it seems doubtful that if Caesar had an elephant, he would have omitted it altogether from his narration, not even mentioning, for example, how the feat of transporting the elephant to Britain was managed.

[48] Polyaen. 8.23.5. We are not told whether the elephant was of the African or Asian kind, but Polyaenus' remake of its size and that it was carrying a turret would seem to imply that it was an Asian elephant. (Charles 2008, 354.)

3.1.1. The three battles against Pyrrhus' war elephants

The Romans first fought against war elephants in 280 BC in a battle against king Pyrrhus of Epirus on a plain near the town of Heraclea in Lucania. This was not only the first time Roman soldiers encountered weaponized elephants with turrets and riders on their backs but the first time the Romans saw these huge animals at all. Pyrrhus had with him 20 Asian elephants, which he left first in reserve but brought into the battle, when it looked like the Romans would be victorious.[49] The effect the war elephants had was devastating. The Romans were completely unprepared to fight against this kind of weapon, so when the elephants joined the battle the Romans and their horses were outright panic-stricken:

> *Introductos autem inter concurrentia agmina elephantos forma truces, odore graues, mole terribiles ut uidere Romani, nouo pugnandi genere circumuenti et territi, equis maxime pauitantibus, diffugerunt*[50]
>
> But when the Romans saw elephants, savage looking, strongly smelling and terrifyingly huge, were led in between the clashing troops, they fled in all direction oppressed and terrified by this new form of warfare, their horses being in a great state of fear.

In the battle of Heraclea, the elephants granted Pyrrhus hic victory, primarily by being a psychological weapon. The ancient writers describing the battle of Heraclea and the other two battles, the battle of Asculum and the battle of Maleventum, where the Romans faced Pyrrhus's was elephants, are unanimous in describing the elephants as monsters, who were savage in appearance, had a strong and strange smell and were terrifyingly huge and ugly. The ancient descriptions of the battle of Heraclea do not say much about how the Romans tried to fend the elephants off. With their cavalry rendered useless and the infantry facing a completely new form of warfare, the Romans had not much they could do. Yet, Orosius and Florus recount one incident, which had a fundamental significance in the development of Roman anti-elephant warfare: one Gaius Numicius, a *hastatus* of the fourth legion, cut with his sword (*gladius*) off the trunk of one of the elephants.[51] By doing so, he made the elephant to turn away from the battle and rush raging upon its own troops. This caused Pyrrhus' army to be thrown into confusion and disorder and the Romans to realize that the best way to defeat enemy elephants was to make them panic. The

[49] Flor. *epit*. 1.13.7–8; Zon. 8.2.
[50] Oros. 4.1.9.
[51] Flor. *epit*. 1.13.9; Oros. 4.1.10.

Roman short sword must have been a rather impractical weapon against a war elephant, because to be able to strike with it the soldier must get very close to the elephant, which meant incurring himself to the danger of the elephant's trunk, tusks and crushing feet. Pliny's claim of the easiness of cutting an elephant's trunk must be an exaggeration.[52] When the Romans started to develop different means and weaponry to use against elephants, long distance weapons were preferred.

The next year (279 BC) the Romans encountered Pyrrhus' war elephants for the second time near the city of Asculum. The third and final battle the Romans fought against Pyrrhus' war elephants took place near the city of Maleventum in 275 BC. Remembering the catastrophic effect that the elephants had had in Heraclea, but also that Numicius had shown that the monsters could be killed, the Romans began to experiment with different ways of countering war elephants. Both in Asculum and in Maleventum we have no mentions of swords being used against the elephants, but instead long-distance weapons like javelins (*pila*)[53] were concentrated against them. Also fire was used. At Asculum torches (*faces*) were hurled on the turrets the elephants carried, and at Maleventum the elephants' backs and turrets were targeted with specially constructed fire-darts (*malleoli*), which were smeared with pitch and had curved prickles (*unci aculei*) on them.[54] The turrets are mentioned as a specific target for the fire missiles in both battles, indicating that the turrets must have been made of inflammable material, like wood, and caught fire, effectively both burning the soldiers riding the elephant and causing the elephant unbearable pain, which it could not escape. When the elephants retreated in panic, they spread the flames from the burning turrets on their own ranks.[55]

A possible later instance of fire used against war elephants is given by the poet Silius Italicus in his poem *Punica*, where he describes flaming torches being thrown at war elephants (*monstra*) during the battle of Cannae:

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[52] Plin. *nat*. 8.7.18: "*Proboscidem eorum facillime amputari Pyrri proeliorum experimentis patuit*."
[53] In the late fourth or early fifth century AD Vegetius mentions in his work *Epitoma Rei Militaris* (3.24.7, 11), when discussing fighting against war elephants, four different types of javelins used against them: 1) *pilum*, the distinctively Roman heavy, close-range throwing javelin, 2) *lancea*, the slender and lighter throwing javelin, 3) *spiculum*, the third century AD throwing javelin similar to *pilum*, and 4) with the cataphract cavalry, *sarisa*, the up to 6 meters long lance distinctive to Macedonian phalanxes, which was wielded with both hands and used to thrust. Vegetius identifies the *sarissa* with *contus*, which was a lance used mainly by Roman auxiliary cavalry from emperor Trajan's time onwards. (Bishop–Coulston 2006, 50–51, 200; Castrén, P.–Pietilä-Castrén 2006, 505; DGRA *s.v.* 'hasta'.
[54] Flor. *epit*. 1.13.10; Oros. 4.1.21.
[55] Vegetius (*mil*. 3.24.12) mentions targeting mahouts and soldiers riding on the elephants with slings (*fundae*) and staff-slings (*fustibali*) as a good method to counter war elephants.

Spargi flagrantes contra bellantia monstra
Dardanius taedas ductor iubet et facis atrae,
quos fera circumfert, compleri sulphure muros.
Nec iusso mora. Collectis fumantia lucent
terga elephantorum flammis, pastusque sonoro
ignis edax uento per propugnacula fertur.[56]

The Roman commander ordered to hurl burning pine-torches
against the fighting monsters and black firebrands to the turrets
the beasts carried around, filling the turrets with sulphur.
And they did not delay in obeying. The backs of the elephants
smoking blazed with flames, and the roaring wind
carried the greedy fire to the turrets consuming them.

The problem with this account is that there are no other mentions of war elephants having any part in the battle of Cannae. Most scholars have deemed Silius' inclusion of elephants in his description of the battle to be most likely writer's freedom. Yet, it seconds the observation that torches and burning weapons were usually aimed to the turrets the elephants were carrying. Livy also mentions that when, during the battle of Capua (211 BC), some Numidians and Spaniards, who were fighting for Hannibal Barca, broke with elephants into the Roman camp, the elephants were driven away with fire. Unfortunately, Livy does not further elaborate in which way fire was used. It should be noted that while the war elephants were obviously afraid of the pain the fire caused them, they did not really fear the sight of flames. For example, when celebrating a fourfold triumph in 46 BC, Caesar was escorted by 40 elephants, 20 on his both sides, carrying flaming torches or lamps, evidently unafraid of the flames when they did not burn them.[57]

Also, some more complex anti-elephant weaponry was tried out both at Asculum and Maleventum. In preparation for the battle of Asculum the Romans had made ready 300 four-wheeled waggons fitted with fire-bearing grapnels and iron-spiked beams bristling in all directions. From these waggons they intended to shoot the elephants with fire and missiles and throw caltrops before their feet. Pain had worked against the elephants at Heraclea, so clearly the idea in these machines was to cause as much pain as possible, in any means possible. Unfortunately for the Romans, these machines apparently were not effective in action. Dionysius of Halicarnassus writes that after some small initial success, the waggons were quite effectively defeated. The elephant-drivers hurled their spears down on the waggons, and the light-armed troops that

[56] Sil. *Pun*. 9.599–604.
[57] Liv. 26.6.9–12; Suet. *Iul*. 37.2.

accompanied the elephants hamstringed the oxen that drew the waggons. What is more, the men working these anti-elephant waggons caused a great deal of confusion, when they fled from the destroyed waggons to the nearest infantry. In Zonaras' account the anti-elephant waggons were even more ineffective as he states that Pyrrhus merely brought his elephants to attach the other end of the Roman battle line.[58]

In this light it is no wonder that a different kind of tactic was tried in the battle of Maleventum: Aelian, in his *De Natura Animalium,* alludes that the Romans turned Pyrrhus' war elephants into flight by setting pigs and horned rams against them.[59] Elephants' fear of squealing pigs was generally recognized in the antiquity, and Lucretius too mentions pigs having been among the different kind of animals that were attempted to use in battle, although he does not speak about them being used against war elephants.[60] Aelian's statement is somewhat problematic, considering that his work is natural historical and none of the surviving sources dealing with the Pyrrhic war mentions pigs or rams being used at Maleventum. Indeed, letting pigs, which must have been in panic to be constantly squealing, loose against elephants is not a strategy without some problems. Since the Romans had no way to steer the pigs to the desired direction, the pigs could have turned back towards their own troops or run past the enemy. Aelian seems to believe that the pigs, if they indeed were employed at Maleventum, had the desired effect, but pigs certainly did not become a usual weapon against elephants. Loud noises that terrified war elephants could be utilized in other, easier ways.[61]

Whether any anti-elephant waggons were used after the battle of Asculum we must turn our attention to the late fourth or early fifth century AD writer Flavius Vegetius, who in his work *Epitoma Rei Militaris* mentions *carroballistae* specially designed to counter elephants. According to him they should be larger than standard *carroballistae* so that they shoot the bolts, which should be fitted with broader and sturdier iron heads, farther and with greater force. These

[58] Dion. Hal. *ant.* 20.1.6–7, 20.2.4–5; Zon. 8.5.
[59] Aelian. *nat.* 1.38. Aelian does not name the battle, but as far as the surviving sources indicate, the battle of Maleventum was the only occasion when the Romans were victorious against Pyrrhus' war elephants. Majority of scholars consider that this was the affair commemorated on an *aes signatum*, which has on the obverse an Asian elephant and on the reverse a hog. (Zafiropoulos 2009, 254)
[60] Lucr. 5.1308–9.
[61] Aelian. *nat.* 1.38; Head 1982, 50.

machines should be drawn by pairs of horses or mules.[62] The anti-elephant waggons of Asculum do not really fit as the paragon for Vegetius' *carroballistae*.[63]

As noted also by Charles and Rance, when describing the *carroballistae* Vegetius uses present tense rather than imperfect or perfect tense as he does, for example, when describing the use of *cataphractes* against elephants. This could be a case of *praesens historicum*, but there is a possibility that it could indicate that Vegetius speaks of a contemporary practice. If this is the case, they must have been used against the Sassanid Persians, who were the only ones to employ elephants in battle against Romans in the fourth century AD. The problem is that Ammianus Marcellinus, who participated in the campaign and is our main source of these battles, does not mention anything resembling Vegetius' *carroballistae* being used.[64] Vegetius says that the *carroballistae* should be drawn by horses or mules. However, according to Dionysius and Zonaras the anti-elephant waggons used in Asculum were drawn by oxen. As there is no indication of the draught-animals being afraid of the elephants, it may be that the one thing about the machines that was not a complete failure, was that oxen were not as easily frightened by the sight and smell of elephants than horses. One vital point in considering the value this kind of animal-drawn weaponry in battle against elephants is that the draught-animals must be unafraid of the elephants so that they would not bolt drawing the *carroballistae* away with them.

3.1.2. Encountering the Carthaginian war elephants

3.1.2.1. The battle of Panormus

The first battle where the Romans fought, as far as our surviving records impart, war elephants with a more tactical strategy was during the First Punic War, in a battle fought in 251 BC near the city of Panormus in Sicily. After a disastrous defeat against Xanthippus in the battle of Bagradas in

[62] Veg. *mil*. 3.24.14–15.
[63] The anonymous writer of the *Libellus de Rebus Bellicis* describes and illustrates an artillery device, *ballista quadrirotis*, mounted on four wheels and drawn by two horses, which is curiously similar to Vegetius' *carroballistae*. The Anonymus' does not specify what kind of enemy the device was meant against. Besides it is uncertain whether the Anonymus' machines were ever actually constructed. (Anon. 7.1)
[64] Charles 2014, 200, 203; Rance 2003, 359.

255 BC the Romans, according to Polybius, were so afraid of the Carthaginian war elephants that they had refused to meet the Carthaginians on level ground, where elephants were most effective, for the following two years. In Sicily, the Roman and Carthaginian troops were often drawn close to one and other, but the Romans kept to mountainous and difficult country, where elephants could not be properly used in battle. [65]

Thus, consul Lucius Caecilius Metellus, who was with his legions inside the city of Panormus, came up with a novel strategy to deal with the elephants. Frontinus tells that he constructed a huge trench (*fossam ingentis magnitudinis*) in front of the city walls and stationed some of his light-armed troops (*hastati*) before it. When the Carthaginian army, commanded by Hasdrubal, son of Hanno, advanced the city with 130 elephants in the front, Metellus ordered the light-armed troops to harass the elephants with their javelins (*tela*) and entice them towards the trench by retreating into the fortifications.[66] The purpose of the trench was both to offer cover for the light-armed troops and to be a trap for the elephants. Elephants are not capable of jumping, so trenches, if wide and deep enough, are very effective in stopping them.[67] So happened at Panormus and when the elephants were forced to stop before the trench, both the *hastati* and the soldiers Metellus had stationed on the city walls showered them with missiles. Part of the elephants were killed and part of them retreated in panic trampling and throwing into disorder their own ranks. Only after thus eliminating the threat of the elephants Metellus brought forth his full army to attack the Carthaginians.

3.1.2.2. The Fabian tactic and the battle of Grumentum

Comparable to how the Romans avoided encountering the Carthaginians and their war elephants on level ground during the First Punic War, was the tactic Quintus Fabius Maximus deployed

[65] Pol. 1.39.11–12.
The Romans had availed themselves of mountainous ground previously at Adys (255 BC), where the Carthaginian army had encamped on a hill. The Romans saw that they could use this as their advantage and, without waiting for the Carthaginians to descend and offer battle on the plane, attacked them on the hill. After hearing what happened at Adys, the Spartan mercenary general Xanthippus stated that the Carthaginians did not own the defeat to the Romans but to their own foolishness and advised the Carthaginian army to march, encamp and offer battle only on level ground where they could win the enemy. (Frontin. *strat*. 2.2.11; Pol. 1.30.7–11; 1.32.1–4)
[66] Frontin. *strat*. 2.5.4; Kistler 2006, 101–102; Pol. 1.40.6–9, 12–15.
[67] No measurements are given for Metellus' trench, but as a comparison, a trench the Spartans dug against Pyrrhus' war elephants in 272 BC was about 6 cubits wide (c. 2,6m) and 4 cubits deep (c. 1,7m). (Plut. *Pyrrh*. 27.4)

during the Second Punic War after the Romans suffered a significant defeat at Trebia (218 BC), the only battle during the Second Punic War, where Carthaginians were able to use their elephants with any real effect.[68] When Fabius got elected as *dictator* in 217 BC and set off to fight Hannibal Barca, he chose a tactic that was quite different from the customary Roman way of waging war and eventually merited him the name *Cunctator*, "The Delayer". Fabius' strategy was to avoid meeting the Carthaginians in pitched battle. It was not a strategy specifically designed as a measure against elephants, but it was an excellent counteraction to defuse the threat of the Carthaginian war elephants. Firstly, the Romans chose to avoid level ground, which prevented the Carthaginians from using their elephants properly. Secondly, instead of engaging the whole Carthaginian army in battle, Fabius preferred to target Carthaginian supply-lines and make small sudden attack against smaller units of the Carthaginian army. As Livy points out, when describing a later battle fought at Grumentum in 207 BC, elephants were not a successful weapon for sudden battles, which needed to be engaged in in hurry:

> (…) *elephanti etiam, quorum nullus usus in repentina ac tumultuaria pugna fuerat, quattuor occisi, duo capti*.[69]
>
> Also of the elephants, which had been of no use in sudden and disorderly battle, four were slain, two captured.

In addition to disrupting Carthaginian supply-lines the Romans also destructed crops in the path of the Carthaginian army and intercepting their foraging parties. Shortage of food and other supplies was of course a hardship for any army but even more so for an army with elephants to feed. Livy relates that because of Fabius' tactic, which was continued by his successors, Hannibal had such great difficulties in providing for his troops that in 217 BC he seriously considered retreating from Italy to Gaul:

> *Frumentatum exeunti Hannibali diuersis locis opportuni aderant, carpentes agmen palatosque excipientes; in casum uniuersae dimicationis, quam omnibus artibus petebat hostis, non ueniebant, adeoque inopia est coactus Hannibal ut nisi cum fugae specie abeundum timuisset, Galliam repetiturus fuerit, nulla spe relicta alendi exercitus in eis locis si insequentes consules eisdem artibus bellum gererent*.[70]

[68] Charles–Rhodan 2007, 372. According to Livy (21.56.1), when the Roman soldiers succeeded in turning the Carthaginian war elephants in flight towards their own ranks in Trebia, Hannibal demonstrated rather exceptional control over his panicked elephant force and ordered them to be driven to the left wing where they could have more success against the Romans' Gallic auxiliary troop, who were less experienced in fighting against elephants.
[69] Liv. 27.42.7.
[70] Liv. 22.32.2–3.

> Whenever Hannibal went out to forage [the Romans] were present in different suitable places harassing the marching army and capturing stragglers; the Romans declined to engage in an all-including combat, which the enemy sought with all their skills, and Hannibal was forced into such a great shortage of provisions that unless he would have feared that departing would seem like fleeing, he would have returned to Gaul, having given up all hope of sustaining his army in those areas, if the next consuls should wage war with the same strategies.

3.1.2.3. The battle of Zama

The battle of Zama (202 BC), the conclusive battle of the Second Punic War, is considered one of the best examples of how the Romans successfully fought against war elephants in a pitched battle. Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, anticipating that Hannibal, who had placed his elephants in the front, was going to open the battle with an elephant charge, decided to arrange his own battle lines in a new unusual manner, which Livy describes as follows:

> *Non confertas autem cohortes ante sua quamque signa instruebat sed manipulos aliquantum inter se distantes ut esset spatium qua elephanti hostium acti nihil ordines turbarent.* (…) *Vias patentes inter manipulos antesignanorum uelitibus—ea tunc leuis armatura erat—compleuit, dato praecepto ut ad impetum elephantorum aut post directos refugerent ordines aut in dextram laeuamque discursu applicantes se antesignanis uiam qua inruerent in ancipitia tela beluis darent.*[71]
>
> However, he did not draw the cohorts up in close order before their respective standards but into maniples, which had considerable distance between them so that there would be space where the enemies' elephants could be driven without disturbing the ranks. (…) The open lanes between the maniples of the front-rank troops he filled with *velites* – they were the light armed force of that time – ordered beforehand to render a path, by fleeing from the elephants' attack either straight behind the ranks or dispersing to right and left joining the front-rank troops, where they would allow the monsters to rush into javelins attacking them from both sides.

The cavalry had been placed in the customary manner on the wings and the order of the three infantry lines was quite normal: *hastati* in the front*, principes* in the middle and *triarii* in the back. The manner how the maniples of those three lines were arranged, on the other hand, was unusual. Instead of the usual checkerboard-pattern, Scipio aligned them one after the other leaving between them the wide alleys (*inter se distantes, ut esset spatium*) Livy mentions. The front part of the lanes, that is to say, the intervals between the maniples of the *hastati*, he filled

[71] Liv. 30.33.1, 3.

with *velites*[72], who had a twofold purpose: for one their task must have been to conceal the lanes and Scipio's plan from the attacking Carthaginians. Along with that they were to lure the war elephants in between the maniples. They were to harass them and then retreat before them to the rear of the army or left or right between the lines, as Livy tells.[73] Later Livy implies that the *velites* retreated expressly to the sides, between the lines and that from there they rained their javelins (*hastas*) on the elephants. When the elephants were in the passages between the maniples they were attacked from both sides.

Vegetius, writing in late fourth or early fifth century AD, maintains that war elephants were usually countered by *velites*, who, without much armour to encumber them, were sufficiently fast and agile to avoid the elephants' trampling feet.[74] However, there is a slight problem with Vegetius' account of *velites* fighting against war elephants. Vegetius namely states that the *velites* set against the elephants were experts in throwing missile on horseback, although in a previous chapter of *Epitoma Rei Militaris* he contradictorily speaks of the *velites* as infantry soldiers, saying that they were often placed to support outnumbered cavalry:

> *Quod si equites impares fuerint, more veterum velocissimi cum scutis levibus pedites ad hoc ipsum exercitati hisdem miscendi sunt, quos velites nominabant.*[75]
>
> But if the cavalries are unequal, accordingly to ancient custom, very swift infantry equipped with light shields and trained for the purpose should be intermingled with it, they are called *velites*.

This is most likely a mistake on Vegetius' part, for although the Romans set also their cavalry to hurl spears and other missiles on the elephants, there is no evidence of *velites* on horseback. On the contrary, in the battles where we have surviving literary evidence describing the actions of *velites* against war elephants, they are quite clearly infantry soldiers. Orosius, when describing how the new form of light troops, which were the *velites*, were employed in battle, says that they were carried into the battle on chariots with the cavalry, but when contact was made with the enemy they instantly dismounted to harass the enemy as infantry soldiers.[76] It is improbable that the *velites* would have sometimes been riding when attacking elephants, also because

[72] *Velites* were light armed troops that were introduced in about 211 BC to replace the old light armed troops (*rorarii*). *Velites* were recruited from the poorest and youngest recruits and armed only with a sword, a javelin and a small circular shield. There were 1200 *velites* in each legion serving as skirmishers. (*OCD s.v.* 'velites')
[73] Quintus Caecilius Metellus might have had this tactic of Scipio's in mind when he decided to place his slingers and archers between the maniples at Muthul in 108 BC. (Sall. *Iug*. 49.6; Scullard 1974, 248.)
[74] Veg. *mil.* 3.24.10–11.
[75] Veg. *mil*. 3.16.5.
[76] Oros. 4.18.10–11.

infantrymen were not retrained to be expert cavalrymen in a hurry, and besides as the *velites* were comprised of the poor citizens, they would not have had horses to use. Furthermore, the horses would have needed to be familiarized with the elephants in order to be beneficial against them. *Velites* are last mentioned in battle in 109–108 BC during the Jugurthine War. They were most likely disbanded as a separate unit and subsumed into the centurions following the Marian reforms in 107 BC. Still mentions of light-armed troops set against war elephants remains after that.[77]

Scipio's tactic at Zama was all in all successful, in Frontinus' opinion even the cause of his victory.[78] Even before the battle had properly started some of the Carthaginian war elephants were frightened by the Romans' trumpets and horns (*tuba* and *cornu*).[79] Yet, Livy states that a few of the elephants showed no fear of the bellowing trumpets and horns. It was customary to the Romans to utter a battle cry and make some racket when charging their enemy, but war elephants are not usually described being frightened by it. It is more than likely that at Zama the frightened elephants were poorly trained whereas the courageous elephants were veterans in battle. The veteran elephants too, when running into Scipio's trap and getting injured, panicked and turned to flee back to their own ranks. Ironically, in the end the war elephants that had been the distinctive weapon of the Carthaginians, were what gained Romans victory at Zama.

3.1.3. From enemies to allies

3.1.3.1. Elephants with the Roman army

The Romans had war elephants in their own ranks for the first time during the Second Macedonian War when they encountered the Macedonian army near the town of Athacus in 200 BC. Livy mentions that the elephants were those that the Romans had captured during the Second Punic War and that they were placed before the Roman ranks when consul Publius Sulpicius Galba Maximus offered battle to the Macedonian king Philip V. However, the Macedonians declined the

[77] OCD *s.v.* 'velites'; Sall. *Iug*. 46.7, 105.2.
[78] Frontin. *strat*. 2.3.16.
[79] Liv.30.33.12–13.

offer of battle, and therefore the elephants did not actually engage in any fighting.[80] The first time Roman war elephants took part in fighting was in 197 BC in a battle fought near the Cynoscephalae-hills. The elephants were placed in front of the right wing, which was held in reserve at the beginning of the battle. They were brought into the fight later, after the two armies had clashed. According to Livy, the effect the elephants had in the battle was decisive as the Macedonians fled in terror at the first sight of them.[81]

Bringing elephants into battle only after the armies had clashed was a very sensible tactic. It ensured that the advancing enemy could not frighten the elephants into turning towards their own side, like, for example, some of Hannibal's elephants had done at Zama. Furthermore, after the armies engaged in fighting the enemy could not as easily shower the elephants with missiles. With only two exceptions, the Romans placed their elephants either behind their ranks or held them first in reserve. [82] This indicates that the Roman way of using war elephants was mainly defensive rather than offensive. The Romans also understood when it was better to leave their elephants in reserve without bringing them into the battle at all. At Magnesia (190 BC) the Romans decided to place their 16 African elephants in reserve behind the *triarii* and did not bring them into the battle because they were up against king Antiochus III's 54 Asian war elephants and knew that their elephants were of no use as they were so outnumbered and besides much smaller than the Asian elephants.[83] In 189 BC when The Romans fought against some Galatian tribes at Olympus Mons they left their elephants, along with the cavalry, in reserve in the plain at the feet of the mountain, because they knew the elephants could not fight on the hillside. Consul Gnaeus Manlius Vulso ordered that the prefects of the troops left in reserve were to observe how the battle went on and render assistance if the situation should demand it. In the end the Romans were victorious on the hillside and as the battle did not descent to the plain the elephants did not engage in it.[84]

No matter how sensible and cautious the Roman way of employing war elephants was, the Romans too suffered from the elephants' drawbacks. In 153 BC when the Romans fought against

[80] Liv. 31.36.4–5.
[81] Liv. 33.8.3, 33.9.6–7.
[82] The exceptions are Athacus (Liv. 31.36.4), where elephants were placed in the frontline but a battle did not ensue, and Thapsus (Caes. Bell. Afr. 81.1, 83.2), where elephants were placed in front of both wings with an unfavourable result. For the battle of Thapsus, see chapter 3.1.3.2 The battle of Thapsus.
[83] Liv. 37.39.13.
[84] Liv. 38.20.10.

Celtiberians near the city of Numantia they placed their 10 war elephants in the rear, as usual, so that they could not be seen by the advancing enemy. When the battle was joined the Roman army divided to let the elephants to the front. The Celtiberians who had never before seen elephants were instantly panic-stricken and fled into the city. The Romans pursued the fleeing enemy to the city walls, where the battle continued until one of the Roman elephants was struck on the head with a large stone and in pain and panic turned against its own side destroying everything on its way. Despite the advantage the elephants had given the Romans earlier, in the end it was the elephants that forced the Romans to retreat.[85]

3.1.3.2. The battle of Thapsus

In 46 BC, when Quintus Caecilius Metellus Scipio, the leader of the Roman optimate forces in North Africa, met Julius Caesar in battle near the city of Thapsus, he had with him 60 war elephants. The elephants were provided to him by his ally, king Juba I of Numidia. In the *Commentarii de Bello Africo*, Scipio is told having placed them in the front of his ranks when he made several unsuccessful attempts to engage Caesar's forces in fighting in Ruspina before the actual battle, indicating that he intended to use the elephants not in a defensive way as had been typical to the Romans in the past but rather in a more offensive way.[86] Accordingly, at Thapsus the elephants partook in the battle right from the beginning. Scipio's decision to deploy the elephants in an offensive way was a great risk, especially as, according to Florus, the elephants were only recently captured from the wild and thus were not well accustomed to fighting.[87] Like multiple previous battles had shown, placing war elephants in the front ranks made them more hazardous also for their own troops. On account of that, Scipio trained his elephants, while in Ruspina, in the following manner:

> *Scipio interim elephantos hoc modo condocefacere instituit. Duas instruxit acies, unam funditorum contra elephantos, quae quasi adversariorum locum obtineret et contra eorum frontem adversam lapillos minutos mitteret; deinde in ordinem elephantos constituit, post illos autem suam aciem instruxit ut, cum ab adversariis lapides mitti coepissent et elephanti perterriti se ad suos convertissent, rursus ab sua acie lapidibus missis eos converterent adversus hostem.*[88]

[85] App. *Hisp.* 9.46.
[86] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 30.2, 41.2–3, 59.3.
[87] Flor. *epit*. 2.13.67.
[88] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 27.1.

> Scipio meanwhile set up to train the elephants in this manner. He drew up two battle-lines of which one consisted of slingers facing the elephants, as if taking the place of the enemies and hurling small stones against their hostile front; then he set the elephants in line, behind them in turn he drew up a battle-line of his own troops so that, when stones would start to be hurled from the enemies' side and the terrified elephants would turn back towards their own side, stones hurled from their own battle-line in turn would cause them to turn back against the enemy.

Such a brief training was not enough, for elephants could be fickle in battle even after years of training. At Thapsus the elephants got frightened by the missiles Caesar's troops concentrated against them and turned to flee trampling on the process their own troops. Addedly, Scipio's Moorish cavalry lost their courage when the elephants bolted and fled from the battle themselves.[89] Thus the elephants turned out to be one of the primary causes to the optimates' decisive defeat.

Scipio's misfortune with war elephants was not solely his own fault. Both the prelude in Ruspina and the battle of Thapsus itself, give an excellent example of how much the Romans had advanced in anti-elephant warfare. To have such confidence in his briefly trained elephants Scipio must have believed Caesar's troops to be completely inept to withstand them due to inexperience in elephant warfare. However, from the account given in the *Commentarii de Bello Africo* of the events before the battle, it is clear that Caesar too knew that the potency of Scipio's elephants was in respect of how familiar his own soldiers and horses were with elephants. To Caesar this was not an insuperable problem: the troops could simply be familiarized with elephants before they encountered them in battle. The writer of the *De Bello Africo* gives the most elaborate description that we have of Romans training to fight elephants[90]:

> *Cui uni rei tamen invenerat remedium: namque elephantos ex Italia transportari iusserat, quo et miles noster speciemque et virtutem bestiae cognosceret et cui parti corporis eius telum facile adigi posset, ornatusque ac loricatus cum esset elephas, quae pars corporis eius sine tegmine nuda relinqueretur, ut eo tela coicerentur; praeterea ut iumenta bestiarum odorem, stridorem, speciem consuetudine capta non reformidarent. Quibus ex rebus largiter erat consecutus: nam et milites bestia manibus pertrectabant earumque tarditatem cognoscebant, equitesque in eos pila praepilata coiciebant, atque in consuetudinem equos patientia bestiarum adduxerat.*[91]

[89] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 83.3.
[90] Over a decade earlier, during the Third Macedonian War, Perseus of Macedon prepared his cavalry for fighting Roman war elephants by constructing elephant dummies, which he smeared with a foul-smelling ointment to imitate the odour of real elephants. The dummies were also designed to emit a roar to imitate the sound of real elephants, probably by having trumpeters concealed inside. The horses were then repeatedly led to these figures until they got used to them. (Head 1982, 49; Polyaen. 4.21.)
[91] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 72.4–5.

> To this one matter however he had invented a solution: for he had ordered elephants to be transported from Italy so that our soldiers could become acquainted with them and also to get to know the appearance and strength of the beast and what parts of its body a javelin could easily pierce and, when an elephant is equipped and armoured, what part of its body would remain bare from covering so that they should throw the javelins there. And moreover, that the beasts of burden would learn by experience not to fear the smell, trumpeting and appearance of the beasts. Of these affairs he achieved much: for his soldiers handled the beast and became aware of their sluggishness, and cavalrymen threw ball-tipped javelins at them, and the beasts' passivity had brought the horses to a companionship with them.

It was first and foremost important that the horses got to know the elephants, because otherwise they could render the whole cavalry useless, as had happened, for example, in Heraclea. In addition to that, Caesar's soldiers prepared themselves to face Scipio's war elephants by learning the weak points of the elephants' armour by throwing ball-tipped dummy-javelins (*pila praepilata*) at them. Unfortunately, the writer of *De Bello Africo* does not mention what those weak and unprotected spots, where the soldier trained to aim, were. When he describes the actual battle there is no implication of aiming javelins or other missiles but rather they were fired at the elephants rapidly in volleys. Indeed, the customary way of using missiles against war elephants was in volleys before the two armies made contact. In fact, the Romans were not aiming to expressly kill the enemy war elephants but to cause them as much pain as possible. If the elephants could be hurt so that they turned to flee and trampled their own troops, it was an even more desirable outcome than killing a few of them, as in that case the elephant attack was not only neutralized but the enemy elephants could even be benefitted of.[92]

However, some of elephants' weak spots can be deduced from other accounts. For instance, Livy, describing the battle of Trebia, says that the underside of an elephant's tail was vulnerable, because there the skin is soft.[93] Pliny, describing how elephants were hunted, states that elephants' feet were very sensitive (*mollissimos*).[94] Also, the trunk must have been mostly unarmoured because otherwise the elephants could not have used it. Indeed, when one of Scipios'

Also Cassius Dio (43.4.1) tells that Caesar ordered some elephants to be brought from Italy so he could train his troops with them. The value of familiarizing the army with elephants and learning their weaknesses transpires well from Pliny's account of Hannibal pitting a Roman prisoner of war against one of his war elephants, promising to let the Roman free, if he managed to kill the elephant. To the Carthaginians' great dismay, he succeeded in doing so. Hannibal let the Roman go but sent riders to kill him on his way home, because he thought that the news of the soldier's victory would evoke in the Romans contempt against Carthaginian war elephants and make them thus a less effective weapon. (Plin. nat. 8.7.18.)

[92] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 83.2: "(…) *funditores sagittariique concita tela in elephantos frequentes iniciunt* (…)".

[93] Liv. 21.55.11.

[94] Plin. *nat*. 8.8.26.

elephants circled a veteran soldier of Caesar's fifth legion with its trunk, the soldier did what Gaius Numicius had done at Heraclea: he hewed the elephant's trunk with his sword.[95]

Another matter of interest is that Scipio had sent spies to find out whether Caesar had ordered any traps or trenches to be made for the elephants in front of his camp and its rampart.[96] No anti-elephant traps are specifically mentioned, but the fortifications of Caesar's camp are indeed described as unusual:

> *Tum egregiae munitiones castrorum atque valli fossarumque altitudo et extra vallum stili caeci mirabilem in modum consiti* (…)[97]
>
> Accordingly, the extraordinary fortifying of the camps and the height of the rampart and the depth of the trench and outside the rampart the hidden stakes, planted in a wonderful way (…)

The modifications that had been done to the usual fortifications of Caesar's camp, are such in kind that it is quite possible that they were made for keeping Scipio's war elephants away. The deeper than usual trenches (*fossae*) also fit with the mentioning of trenches by Scipio's spies. Trenches would have been very effective in stopping elephants, as they are not capable of jumping. The unusually high rampart (*vallum*) in turn made sure that if there were slingers or archers riding on the war elephants' backs, they could not shoot over the rampart to the camp. The concealed stakes (*stili caeci*) refer likely to caltrops (*tribuli*) or short spikes that were sticking out of the ground. Any kind of spikes that the elephants could step on, were very effective against them. Elephants' soles are very sensitive and completely unprotected, and if the elephant steps on something its massive weight makes sure that the offending spike sinks deep into the elephant's flesh. The pain caused by the spikes would not only stop the elephants from attacking but also prevent them from retreating, making them an easy target for Caesar's archers.[98]

Caesar had approximately ten legions with him at Thapsus. According to *De Bello Africo*, he left two of them to guard his camp and siege line in front of the city, and five legions are mentioned being positioned on the wings of his battle line.[99] The number of elephants Caesar had received from Italy is not mentioned but it was not very large[100]. Scipio and his ally Juba had 60 elephants with them before the battle of Thapsus, and Orosius' claims that all 60 elephants were

[95] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 84.1–4; Flor. *epit.* 1.13.9.
[96] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 35.4.
[97] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 31.7.
[98] Kistler 2006, 56.
[99] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 80.4, 81.1; Goldsworthy 2008, 465.
[100] Cass. Dio 43.4.1.

captured by Caesar. After the battle Caesar drew 64 elephants up in array in front of the town of Thapsus. Even after taking to account that some of the elephants that had fought in the battle must have been wounded and unable to participate, it could be estimated that Caesar had only few elephants of his own.[101] A small number of elephants would not have been enough to intensively train all his nearly 50 000[102] infantry soldiers along with his cavalry.

Therefore, Caesar did some modifications to his battle formation. He tasked countering the war elephants especially to the Fifth legion. When he observed that Scipio had placed his elephants on the right and left wing of his battle line, as was his custom, Caesar divided the Fifth legion in half stationing five cohorts to form a fourth line on both of his wings.[103] In the brief account of the battle itself, most credit of the success against Scipio's war elephant is given to the archers and slingers (*sagittariis, funditoribus*), who were placed on the wigs as well, but as has been observed above, one Fifth legion soldier is mentioned defending his unarmed comrade against one of the war elephants:

> *Armatus, qui in eiusmodi periculo constanter agendum sibi videret, gladio proboscidem qua erat circumdatus caedere quantum viribus poterat non destitit. Quo dolore adductus elephas milite abiecto maximo cum stridore cursuque conversus ad reliquas bestias se recepit.*[104]
>
> The soldier, who perceived that in this sort of danger firm actions were needed from him, did not cease to cut with his sword the elephant's trunk, which was encircling him, with as much strength as he could muster. The pain led the elephant to throw the soldier down with much trumpeting and quickly turn around and returned to the other beasts.

A particularly interesting description of the use of slings (*funda*) against war elephants is given in *De Bello Africo.* The writer states that the elephants were afraid of the shriek or whistle (*stridor*) of the slings, suggesting that at least at Thapsus the effectiveness of slings against elephants was not based only on the pain the projectiles inflicted upon them but also in the sound the slings made.

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[101] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 86.1; Charles–Rhodan 2008, 180; Oros. 6.16.3.
Based to the use of the word *captos* referring to the elephants in *Bell. Afr*. 86.1 (*"*(…) *ante oppidum Thapsum constitit elephantosque LXIIII ornatos armatosque cum turribus ornamentisque capit, captos ante oppidum instructos constituit* (…)"), some scholars believe that the correct number of elephants in the battle must have been at least 64. A more probable solution, though, is that the four additional elephants were of Caesar's own stock.
[102] During Caesars time one legion consisted of ten cohorts of 480 men, which means that eight legions, if in full strength would have consisted of 48 000 legionaries. (Southern 2014, 143.)
[103] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 81.1; Kistler 2006, 164. In commemoration to their achievements against war elephants at Thapsus, the Fifth legion adapted elephant as its emblem. (App. *civ*. 2.96.)
[104] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 84.3–4.

> (…) *bestiae stridore fundarum, lapidum plumbique iactu perterritae sese convertere et suos post se frequentis stipatosque proterere et in portas valli semifactas ruere contendunt.*[105]
>
> The beasts, thoroughly terrified by the shrill whistling of the slings, stones and lead bullets that were hurled [against them], turned around and trampling their own troops that were crowded and thronged behind them and hastened to rush to the half-completed gates of the rampart.

Elephants' fear of loud, shrill sounds was well known and exploited since the time of the Pyrrhic war. War elephants had been harassed with shouting, trumpets and horns, bonging of shields and shrieking pigs but before Thapsus there is no mentions of war elephants fearing the sound of slings. The use of the word *stridor* for the sound of slings is not as such exceptional[106] as it can also be translated as a whizz, a hiss, a hum or other similar sound caused by something passing swiftly through the air – a sling certainly makes a whooshing-sound when rotated with speed – but it is peculiar that, in the tumult of battle, the whizzing of slings would have been a terrible and audible enough sound to frighten the elephants.[107]

It is interesting to compare this statement of whistling slings in the *De Bello Africo* to the sling bullets found in 2015, during the archaeological excavation of a Roman military camp and a potential battlefield at Burnswark Hill in Southwest-Scotland. In addition to regular sling bullets the archaeologists excavating the site found some special bullets that were made of lead, weighed about 20 grams and had a hole, 5 millimetres in diameter and depth, drilled in them. These holes were found to cause the bullets to make a shrill, whistle-like sound when they flew, adding a terror-bringing aspect to them. The bullets found from Burnswark Hill date back only to the second century AD, but ceramic sling bullets with holes that date to the second and third centuries BC has been found at battle sites in Greece.[108] The fact that the writer of the *De Bello Africo*, mentions that the elephants were not frightened only by the projectiles (*lapidum plumbique*) shot at them but also by the whistling could indicate that something similar to the whistling bullets found at Burnswark Hill was used at Thapsus. After all, sling bullets were quite easy to

[105] Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 83.2.
[106] See e.g. Stat. *Theb*. 8.416; Verg. *Aen*. 9.585.
[107] OLD s.v. 'strido'.
[108] Reid 2016; Metcalfe 2016.

manufacture, and when needed the Roman legions were able to produce them themselves, making it thus possible to modify them to suite the occasion.[109]

At the end of the republican time war elephants were not seen as awe-inspiring monster anymore but instead considered in a rather contemptuous manner. It the *De Bello Africo* it is stated:

> (…) *rudes enim elephanti multorum annorum doctrina usuque vetusto vix edocti tamen communi periculo in aciem producuntur.*[110]
>
> (…) for elephants are unruly, and even after many years of training and long-continued use they are hardly thoroughly trained but a danger to both sides when led forth in battle-formation.

Livy, when describing how the panicked Carthaginian war elephants rushed back against their own troops at the battle of Canusium (209 BC), names elephants as *genus anceps*.[111] Scullard translates *anceps* here simply as "two-edged", interpreting that it means that war elephants were a double-edged weapon that could be harmful to both sides.[112] While this was undoubtedly true, in this case, as the word *anceps* is referring to the word *genus*, it seem more adequate to translate it as "untrustworthy" or "unreliable".[113] This would insinuate that the elephants were considered as an untrustworthy species. It was in their very nature that they were faithless and could turn against their own side. Shelton points out that by deeming elephants untrustworthy the Romans attributed to them the same characteristic they associated with Carthaginian people.[114]

3.2. Elephant warfare in the imperial time

The use of war elephants was only occasional and small-scale during Rome's imperial time.[115] The only enemy to march elephants against the Roman Empire was the Sassanids, against whom the Romans fought eight battles, where elephants were verily present:

[109] Thorne 2007, 222.
[110] Caes. *Bell*. *Afr*. 27.2.
[111] Liv. 27.14.9.
[112] Scullard 1974, 249.
[113] OLD s.v. 'anceps'.
[114] Shelton 2006, 17. To the Romans the phrase "*punica fides"* had become an ironic proverbial expression meaning untrustworthiness and treachery. (OLD s.v. 'punicus')
[115] Scullard 1974, 197-199.

The second siege of Nisibis (AD 338)	The battle of Maranga (AD 363)
The third siege of Nisibis (AD 350)	Two battles of Samarra (AD 363, June 26. and June 27.)
The siege of Amida (AD 359)	The battle of Sumere (AD 363)
The battle of Ctesiphon (AD 363)	

In addition, there are three cases in which the use of elephants is unclear but which are worth mentioning[116]: firstly, during his invasion of Britain in AD 43, emperor Claudius, according to Cassius Dio, had had some extensive equipment, which included elephants, been put together before he arrived in Britain to help his troops. Unfortunately, Cassius Dio does not mention what became of Claudius' elephants. It remains unknown whether they were after all even taken over to Britain and had any role in Claudius' expedition. Since the elephants were not, at any rate, a part of the expeditionary force but are said having arrived only afterwards with the emperor, Jennison believes they must have been meant for impressing the natives not in military operations but in ceremonies[117].

Secondly, in AD 193, when Didius Julianus was confronting the invasion of Septimius Severus, he is told having tried to repurpose the elephants that were kept in Rome for ceremonial use, into war elephants by fitting them with turrets in hope that they would terrify the enemy.[118] Thirdly, the *Historia Augusta* claims that in AD 231, when emperor Severus Alexander came to the aid of the city of Nisibis, the Persians sieging the city had with them 700 elephants carrying turrets and archers. 200 of them were reportedly killed and 30 captured by the Romans. These numbers are clearly very much exaggerated, and, as Scullard remarks, could be divided by ten.[119] This, and the fact that no other account of the battle mention elephants at all, has made most scholars to question the elephants' presence in Nisibis in AD 231. It has been suggested that if the *Historia Augusta*, the dating of which is uncertain, was written in or after the time of emperor Julian, when elephants indeed were employed by the Sassanian army, their inclusion may have been only due to the assumption that the Persians would have had them at Nisibi also in AD 231.[120]

[116] All the uncertain cases are included in Appendix 1: Table of battles featuring elephants.
[117] Cass. Dio. 60.21.1–2; Jennison 1937, 66.
[118] Herodian. 2.11.9.
[119] Scullard 1974, 201; Hist. Aug. *Alex.* 55.2, 56.3.
[120] Scullard 1974, 201.

4.2.1. Elephants in siege-warfare at Nisibis and Amida

In AD 359 the Persian king Shapur II laid siege to the highly strategic Roman outpost of Amida with an unknown number of elephants in his troops. Ammianus Marcellinus, who served under the *magister equitum* Ursicinus and was among the besieged, describes the sight of the elephants as follows:

> *elata in arduum specie elephantorum agmina rugosis horrenda corporibus leniter incedebant armatis onusta, ultra omnem diritatem taetri spectaculi formidanda, ut rettulimus saepe*. (…)[121] *Lux nobis aduenit maestissima Persarum manipulos formidatos ostentans adiectis elephantorum agminibus, quorum stridore immanitateque corporum nihil humanae mentes terribilius cernunt.* (…) *elephantis ui magna propulsis, quos flammis coniectis undique circumnexos iam corporibus tactis gradientesque retrorsus regere magistri non poterant.*[122]
>
> Brought forth in a lofty spectacle were herds of elephants, horrifying with their wrinkled bodies they slowly marched, loaded with armed men, a foul spectacle frightful beyond all terror, like we have often told. (…) A most sorrowful day dawned to us exposing to view Persians' frightful maniples along with troops of elephants, whose trumpeting and monstrously big bodies, nothing more frightful human minds perceive. (…) The elephants were driven back with great violence, they were surrounded with flames that were thrown from all sides, and right when [the torches] touched their bodies they started rushing backwards, and the mahouts were not able to control them.

Ammianus' statement of the elephants carrying armed men is interesting because it seems to suggest that the elephants were equipped with turrets. This was not necessarily the case[123], but Charles for one deems the use of turrets to be most probable.[124] Even if the Sassanids would have ridden their elephants bareback on battlefield, it would be more fitting for siege-warfare to have turrets protecting the soldiers riding the elephants. Indeed, we are told by Julian that when Shapur II was sieging Nisibis in AD 350[125], their elephants were equipped with iron turrets full of archers[126], and Procopius describes the Sassanid war elephants carrying wooden turrets in the time of Justinian, allowing the Sassanid troops to tower over the walls of the besieged city

[121] Amm. 19.2.3.
[122] Amm. 19.7.6–7.
[123] It is believed that the Indian elephants Alexander the Great fought against in Hydaspes (326 BC), were carrying, in addition to their mahouts, soldiers who were riding on their back in the same way as on horseback. (Charles 2007, 331)
[124] Charles 2007, 332.
[125] Shapur had elephants also when he sieged Nisibis for the first time in AD 337 or 338. The only thing that is said of the elephants is that reportedly they were fended off by a swarm of mosquitoes flying into their trunks as an answer to the prayer of bishop Jacob who led the towns defence. This seems rather unlikely. However, hurling beehives on the advancing elephants could be a plausible explanation and a paragon to this miracle. (Mayor 2003, 180; Theod. *hist. eccl*. 2.31.13.)
[126] Iul. *or.* 2.63. Julian names the besiegers Parthians, but they were in fact Sassanids.

shooting arrows at defenders.[127] When Shapur ordered the elephants to attack the walls of Amida, the Romans fended them off with fire. Ammianus describes firebrands having been thrown down at the elephants from the city walls so that the elephants' skin was burned causing them to panic and become uncontrollable by their drivers. Firebrands hitting the elephants' skin could indicate that the elephants did not wear any extensive armour or equipment.

Another interesting point in Ammianus' narration is how vehemently he describes the horribleness of the elephants, which in the end barely posed a threat to the Romans. Nine years earlier, when the Romans were besieged in Nisibis, the sight of Shapur's elephants approaching the city walls in a battle line resembling a wall with towers, had, according to Julian, neither impressed nor frightened the Romans. He states that the Romans thought the formation looked like a splendid and costly pageant. The explanation to this could be that before the elephants were marched forth at Nisibis, Shapur's cavalry had already proven to be too heavy to cross the ground that was converted to a bog because the Persians had dammed and altered the course of the river Mygdonius to use it to breach the city wall. Therefore, it must have been obvious to the besieged Romans that there was no need to fear the even heavier elephants crossing the same terrain. Indeed, such a foolish attempt must have been amusing to the Romans.[128]

4.2.2. The five elephant-battles of AD 363

In AD 363 the Romans fought five battles – one near the city of Ctesiphon, one in the district of Maranga, two near the city of Samarra and one near the fortress of Sumere – where they encountered Sassanid elephants in open battle. Our main source for these battles is Ammianus Marcellinus, who also in this case was a participant in the events. The first point of interest in Ammianus' account of the battles of AD 363, is the placement of the Sassanid elephants in their battle line. According to Ammianus the elephants were placed both at Ctesiphon and Maranga at the rear of the battle formation, behind both the cataphract cavalry and the infantry.

[127] Charles 2007, 332; Procop. *aed*. 2.1.11.
[128] Iul. or. 2.64–65.

At Ctesiphon:

> *Contra haec Persae obiecerunt instructas catafractorum equitum* (…) *in subsidiis manipuli locati sunt peditum* (…) *Post hos elephanti gradientium collium specie motuque inmanium corporum propinquantibus exitium intentabant documentis praeteritis formidati.* [129]
>
> Against our troops the Persians presented mail-clad cavalrymen drawn in battle order (…) placed as supportive troops to them were maniples of infantrymen (…) behind them were the elephants that looked like walking hills and by the movement of their enormous bodies threatened destruction to those approaching them, from past experience they were feared.

At Maranga:

> *Post hos elephantorum fulgentium formidandam speciem et truculentos hiatus uix mentes pauidae perferebant, ad quorum stridorem odoremque et insuetum aspectum magis equi terrebantur.*[130]
>
> Behind them [the cataphract cavalry and archers] the terrifying appearance and savage, wide-opened jaws of the gleaming elephants were hardly endured by timid minds; in addition, their trumpeting and odour and unusual appearance alarmed the horses even more.

It is also important to note that Ammianus does not elaborate whether the elephants were actually actively involved in the fighting at Ctesiphon and Maranga. Charles and Rance suggest that the elephants' purpose might have been rather to prevent the Sassanid soldiers from turning to flee and, if necessary, to cover their withdrawal by preventing the enemy cavalry from pursuing them. They suggest further that the elephants were not war elephants in the same sense as, for example, the Punic elephants, that were trained to fight, had been but rather army elephants that were used in logistical purposes.[131]

It is indeed somewhat curious that Ammianus, after emphasizing how horrible the elephants were, neglects to give any mention of their role in the fighting. However, there are some points in Ammianus' description that seems to conflict with Rance's theory. Firstly, Ammianus claims that at Maranga the elephants were gleaming (*fulgentium*), which seems to imply that they wore metal armour. During the second battle of Samarra the elephants wore horrifying crests (*cristarum a horrore*), which indicates they had been fitted at least with some head armour. There would be little reason to armour elephants, if they were not meant for battle, but it does not necessarily exclude the possibility that they were utilized as beasts of burden when the army was marching.[132]

[129] Amm. 24.6.8.
[130] Amm. 25.1.14.
[131] Charles 2007, 321–322; Rance 2003, 364, 382–383.
[132] Amm. 25.1.14, 25.3.12.

Secondly, at Sumere the elephants were at the front of the Sassanid formation. This seems a hazardous decision if the elephants were solely a logistical part of the army and were not trained to endure battle. As had been demonstrated numerous times before, untrained elephants were likely to panic and turn to trample their own forces. Ammianus tells that at Maranga the mahouts were equipped with knives so that if they lost the control of their elephants they could by killing them prevent them from turning on their own troops, as had happened in Nisibis.[133] Yet, Ammianus does not in any way indicate that the elephants would have panicked. He describes how both armies raised their battle-cries and blared their trumpets in the usual manner [134], but the elephants were apparently not frightened by this although, according to Livy, the most likely poorly trained, but still trained, war elephants of Hannibal had been frightened by the Romans' trumpets at Zama.[135]

Charles speculates that Ammianus' remarks of the Romans not being able to endure the smell and trumpeting of the elephants "may owe more to his literary antecedents than to his own observations".[136] Ammianus may be exaggerating the terrifying effect of the Sassanid elephants, but it is quite clear that the Romans and their horses were not sufficiently familiar with elephants. Nor were they in the way of weaponry and tactics prepared to encounter elephants. Ammianus does not speak of any fanciful anti-elephant machines or innovative strategies to counter them. Of course, the battles at Samarra and Sumere were sudden attacks, made by the Sassanids against the marching Roman army, wherefore there was no time for emperor Julian or, after his death in Samarra, for emperor Jovian to plan the battles. Nevertheless, Ammianus is quite vague in describing how the Roman confronted the elephants. He only mentions that during the first battle of Samarra they hacked at the elephants' legs and backs, and that at Sumere the legions *Joviani* and *Herculiani* were able to kill two elephants and the legions *Jovii* and *Victories* another two. Unfortunately, Ammianus does not elaborate how they managed this task.[137]

Another point of interest is that the Sassanids seemingly employed the elephants together with their heavily armoured cataphracts-troops, whereas during the republican time elephants had been usually companied and protected by light-armed troops.[138] Vegetius claims that

[133] Amm. 25.1.15.
[134] Amm. 24.6.11.
[135] Liv. 30.33.12–13.
[136] Charles 2007, 325.
[137] Amm. 25.3.4–5, 25.6.3–3.
[138] Amm. 25.3.4, 11.

cataphract cavalry- (*cataphracti* or *catafracti, clibanarii, cataphractarii* or *catafracrarii*) and infantrymen (*cataphracti milites*) were specially armed troops that was used *against* war elephants. Cataphract cavalrymen were protected from the archers riding on the elephants' back by their extensive armour and avoided the elephants because of the swiftness of their horses. Cataphract infantrymen were protected by huge iron spikes (*aculei ingentes ponerentur e ferro*) set on their arms, shoulders and helmets to prevent the elephants from seizing them with their trunks. Vegetius describes cataphract cavalry as follow:

> (…) *bini catafracti equi iungebantur ad currum, quibus insidentes clibanarii sarisas, hoc est longissimos contos, in elephantos dirigebant; nam muniti ferro nec a sagittariis quos vehebant beluae laedebantur et earum impetum equorum celeritate vitabant.*[139]
>
> Pairs of cataphract horses were harnessed to a chariot; the horses were mounted by mail-clad (*clibanarii*) soldiers, who directed *sarisae*, which are very long pikes, at the elephants; for as they were protected with iron they were not harmed by the archers the beasts carried, and their attack they avoided due to the swiftness of their horses.

Although the horses were harnessed to pull a chariot, Vegetius says that the soldiers were mounted on the horses, not riding in the chariots. The chariots presumably had the function of protecting the back of the horse and the rider, possibly preventing the elephants from seizing them or tripping the horse with their trunks.[140]

Although heavily mailed troops were known to the Romans already since the Seleucid war against Antiochus III, there is no resolute evidence that Romans themselves used them before the time of emperor Hadrian's reign. Even after that, there are no accounts of battles where Roman *cataphracti* or *clibanarii* would have fought against war elephants to verify Vegetius' claim of the heavily armoured troops being used against elephants.[141]

[139] Veg. *mil*. 3.24.7–8.
[140] Milner 1996, 113 n. 5. Milner points out the similarity between Vegetius' description of chariot-drawing cataphracts and the descriptions and illustrations of *currodrepanus*, *currodrepanus singularis* and *currodrepanus clipeautus* given by the Anonymus in his *Libellus de Rebus Bellicis*. The *currodrepanus* was drawn with two scale-armoured horses ridden each by a fully armoured soldier wielding a long spear, the *currodrepanus singularis* was drawn with one also scale-armoured horse ridden by a fully armoured soldier with a long two-pointed spear, and the *currodrepanus clipeautus* was drawn by two scale-armoured horses guided by one fully armoured soldier wielding a spear. (Anon. 12.1–14.2.)
[141] Charles 2014, 195 n.27; Eadie 1967, 163; Southern 2014, 267.

4. ELEPHANTI IN TRIUMPHO URBEM INIERUNT

Time to time the Romans managed to capture elephants from battlefield, sometimes they received them through peace treaties, sometimes they were given to them as gifts. For example, the Carthaginians relinquished their war elephants to Rome after losing the Second Punic War in 202 BC, as did the Macedonians after losing the Second Macedonian War in 197 BC and the Seleucids after losing their war against Rome in 190 BC. In 112 BC the Numidian king Jugurtha handed 30 elephants over to the Romans to avoid war, and in 108 BC, after he had fought and lost a war against Rome, he was obliged to relinquish all his elephants.[142] Not all the captured and given elephants reached the city of Rome though. For instance, the elephants received from the Macedonians and the Seleucids were gifted to king Eumenes II Soter of Pergamon, who had aided the Romans during the campaigns.[143] Some of the Carthaginian elephants the Romans received after the Second Punic War were given to the Numidian king Masinissa, albeit a great number of them were taken to Rome.[144] Especially during the republican time, the elephants that were taken to Rome were primarily used to represent Roman victories and military power.

4.1. Roman victory celebrations

In the republican time a triumph (*triumphus*) was one of the greatest, if not indeed the greatest honour the senate could bestow to a victorious general. In the imperial time it was an honour

[142] Carthage: Liv. 30.37.3; Macedonia: Liv. 33.30.6; Seleucids: Liv.38.38.7; Jugurtha: Sall. *Iug*. 29.6, 62.5.
[143] Liv. 33.30.10, 38.39.5. Livy says (33.30.10), referring to Valerius Antias, that the elephants received from the Macedonians were given to Attalus, Eumenes' father, but as he had died before the war had ended the elephants must have been in fact given to Eumenes.
[144] Östenberg 2009, 171, 177; Zon. 9.14.
Gifting elephants to ally kings was an excellent investment. For instance, later on when the Romans wanted elephants for their own military use, Masinissa and his successors supplied the Roman army with war elephants (e.g. Masinissa provided 10 elephants to Titus Quinctius Flamininus during the Second Macedonian War, 20 elephants against Antiochus III during the Seleucid War, 22 against Perseus during the Third Macedonian War, 10 elephants to Quintus Fulvius Nobilior during the Second Celtiberian War and some elephants to Scipio Aemilianus during the Third Punic War. His son Micipsa sent 10 elephants to Quintus Fabius Maximus Aemilianus during the Lusitanian War and 12 to Scipio Aemilianus during the Numantine War. [Scullard 1974, 178.]), without the Romans needing to finance the elephants' keep and training.

preserved exclusively to the emperor and his closest family. The tradition of the triumph has its origin already in Rome's regal period, when it was celebrated as a purification rite. In the fourth and third centuries BC, with Rome's large-scale wars of conquest and territorial expansion, the victory processions developed from religious ceremonies more and more towards entertaining spectacles, where the main focus was in emphasising Rome's power, advertising the successfully fought military campaign and the achievements of the Roman soldiers, displaying the spoils of war and captured enemies and making the conquered regions known to the Roman public. As it happens, elephants had a consequential part in this development: the first Roman triumph ever to feature what from the Roman perspective were exotic animals, was Manius Curius Dentatus' triumph in 275 BC, where he showed war elephants that had been captured from Pyrrhus.[145]

After having obtained its spectacular form a triumphal procession started from *Campus Martius*, entered the city of Rome through *porta triumphalis*, made its way through *forum Holitorium* and *forum Boarium*, past *Circus Maximus* and through *forum Romanum* to the Capitoline Hill and the temple of Juppiter. The procession can be divided into three groups. The first group consisted of the booty: enemy standards, sacrificial animals, golden crowns, images of conquered places and battles, hostages, prisoners[146] and trumpeters. The second group was for the triumphator in his triumphal chariot, his children, who rode beside him, and the army officers, who followed behind the chariot. The final group in the procession consisted of the soldiers of the victorious army and their standards. This tripartite division can be taken as a basis for a triumphal procession, but it should be remembered that all triumphs were distinctive in composition.[147]

In addition to the "proper" triumph the Romans had during the republican time two lesser processions: the ovation (*ovatio*) and the *triumphus in monte Albano*. An ovation could be granted to a general if the criterions[148] of a full triumph hadn't been met or the senate, for some reason or another, was unwilling to bestow the honour of a triumph to the general but could not completely

[145] Hölscher 2006, 37; Östenberg 2009, 173–174; Scullard 1981, 213. Flor. *epit*. 1.13.27–28.

[146] The prisoners presented in the triumphal procession were always non-Roman. Roman deserters and traitors were not shown in triumphs. (Östenberg 2009, 264.)

[147] Beard 2007, 81–82; Östenberg 2009, 9–10, 40, 264.

[148] 1) At least 5000 enemy soldiers must have been killed without too many own soldiers lost. 2) The general wanting a triumph must be a magistrate with *imperium,* who has fought the campaign under his own *auspicia*. 3) The war must have extended Roman territory. 4) The victory must have been won in a just war against a foreign nation. Victory, for instance, in a civil war or against slaves or pirates was not sufficient. 5) The war must have been brought to an end so that the army could be brought back to Rome for the triumph. The significance of these criterions in practice is rather controversial, because a great deal of political conniving affected the decision. (OCD s.v. 'triumph'; Scullard 1981, 214.

ignore his achievements. Like a triumph, an ovation was celebrated by parading through the city of Rome. Its main difference to triumph was that it was less festive.[149] In the imperial era, when the right to celebrate a triumph became exclusively the emperor and his family's, ovations ceased to be celebrated quite quickly. The last known ovation was held in AD 47, when emperor Claudius gave the honour to Aulus Plautius for his achievements in Britain.[150]

If neither a triumph nor an ovation was granted by the senate, a victorious general could arrange a triumph outside the city of Rome on the Alban Mount (*triumphus in monte Albano*). What is most interesting is that these triumphs were nevertheless considered official enough to be recorded in the *fasti triumphales*. This was a quite short-lived phenomenon lasting from 231 BC to 172 BC.[151]

The ancient Romans organized a variety of different kinds of animal spectacles[152]: presentations of exotic animals without harming them, hunting displays, fights between professional animal fighters (*venatores, bestiarii*) and wild beasts, fights between different animal species, executions of criminals by animals (*damnato ad bestias*) and shows where trained animals performed tricks.[153] During the republican time *venationes* were organised in the *Circus Maximus*, but when they were combined with the gladiatorial games in the beginning of the imperial time, they were moved to the amphitheatres. Although on special occasions, like triumphs or anniversaries, when large amounts of large animals were presented at once and an extensive amount of room was needed, *venationes* were arranged in the circus also during the imperial time.[154]

The origin of *venationes* as spectacular entertainment in ancient Rome is not altogether clear. Two theories, which are not mutually exclusive, has been suggested. The first theory is that the *venationes* originate from religious rituals, where animals had an active role instead of being

[149] In an ovation the general had to walk or ride on horseback through the city instead of in the triumphal chariot. Instead of the purple toga (*toga picta*) and laurel wreath of a triumphator, he was dressed in a purple edged toga (*toga praetexta*) and wore a wreath of myrtle. The ovation procession was accompanied by flutes not trumpets and the animal to be sacrificed on the Capitoline, at the end of the procession, was a lam not ox as was the case in a triumph. (Castrén–Pietilä-Castrén 2006, 391; Scullard 1981, 217.)

[150] Beard 2007, 290–291.

[151] Beard 2007, 199-200; Lundgreen 2014, 18; Popkin 2016, 19.

[152] Most modern studies use the term *venatio* of all the different types of animal spectacles, though in antiquity it referred specifically to the hunting spectacles. In this study too, the term *venatio* shall be used to collectively refer to different kind of animal spectacles.

[153] Dodge 2011, 50.

[154] Futrell 2000, 29; Klar 2006, 166.

mere sacrifices.[155] The second theory, however, connects *venationes* with victory celebrations, suggesting that *venationes* originate from the habit of bringing exotic and peculiar animals back from conquered provinces to be displayed to the people in Rome.[156] Especially in republican Rome the *venationes* were closely associated with celebrating victories and military achievements[157], though there is no irrefutable proof that they would have been an integral part of the triumphal processions.[158] For this discussion, however, it is sufficient to note that some victorious generals did give votive games (*ludi votivi*) or organized games as part of, for example, inauguration of temples vowed before or during the campaign and that in some cases these games included animal spectacles.

Votive games were often founded with spoils of war, and in some cases the prisoners of war and animals that had previously been presented in a triumph, performed in the games. This was the case, for instance, with Lucius Caecilius Metellus' triumph and games in 250 BC. Sometimes votive games were held as long as some years after the victory and possible triumph. In these cases, it is quite safe to assume that if animals were seen in the *ludi*, they were not obtained from the war and had not taken part in the victory procession, if one was held after the campaign. Feeding and caring for a large number of animals for a long time would have become vastly expensive.

4.2. Elephants in *triumfi* and *ovationes*

In Roman victory processions animals were primarily considered to be part of the spoils. Animals of different species were all displayed in a single miscellaneous group, with the foremost purpose of conveying to the public what riches and new territories Rome had conquered. Occasionally

[155] Especially *Floralia* in which hares and roebucks were let loose and hunted in the *circus*; *Cerialia* in which foxes with burning torches tied to them were let loose in the *circus*; and *Ludi Taurei*, which may have included ritual hunting of bulls. (Scullard 1981, 103, 111, 156; Futrell 2000, 24-26)

[156] Futrell 2000, 24-26.

[157] Kyle 1994, 181.

[158] The *Ludi Triumphales* should not be confused to mean *ludi* that were integral part of a triumph. The *Ludi Triumphales* were an annual celebration, held at the end of September to commemorate the decisive victory of Constantine the Great over his rival Licinius in the battle of Chrysopolis in AD 342. Though the *Ludi Triumphales* are indeed a celebration of victory they have nothing to do with the discussion of whether or not *ludi* were originally extensions of triumphs. (Beard 2007, 263–264)

elephants too occurred in groups with other animals, representing the diversity of the world Rome reigns over, but elephants had also a more special role: along with horses, elephants were the only animals exhibited in Roman victory processions in groups of only their own species. This was because, whereas other animals had virtually without exception been taken as booty or been received as gifts from the defeated enemy, elephants, like horses, had fought with the enemy and were often captured on the battlefield. This makes the role and purpose the elephants had in victory processions more versatile and interesting.[159]

Seneca, Eutropius and Pliny tell that elephants were seen in Rome for the first time in the triumph that was celebrated by Manius Curius Dentatus in 275 BC, in memory of defeating Pyrrhus and the Samnites.[160] Overall elephants were verily present in 7 victory processions during the republican time:

Manius Curius Dentatus' triumph (275 BC)
Lucius Caecilius Metellus' triumph (250 BC)[161]
Marcus Claudius Marcellus' ovation (211 BC)
Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus' triumph (201 BC)
Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus' unofficial victory procession in Gaul (121 BC)[162]
Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus' triumph (c. 80 BC)
Gaius Julius Caesar's fourfold triumph (46 BC)

It is also worth mentioning that along with these processions, where living elephants took part, two triumphs were held, where a significant number of elephant tusks were presented. In 189 BC Scipio Asiaticus showed 1231 tusks in his triumph over Antiochus III and in 167 BC Lucius Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus showed 2000 tusks in his triumph over Macedonia and king

[159] Shelton 2007, 121; Östenberg 2009, 171–172.
[160] Eutr. 2.14.5; Plin. *nat*. 8.6.16; Sen. *dial.* 10.13.3.
In the seventh book of his *Naturalis Historia* (*nat*. 7.43.139) Pliny contradicts himself, saying that Lucius Caecilius Metellus would have been the one who first brought elephants to Rome:" *L. Metelli (…), qui primus elephantos ex primo Punico bello duxit in triumpho* (…)". No other source supports this claim, so most likely what Pliny writes in the seventh book is either erroneous or should be interpreted differently. Scullard and Östenberg propose that Pliny means that Metellus was the first to display elephants in a triumph during the First Punic War. Some scholars have also suggested that there is an error in the text and that instead of the word '*primus'* there should be '*plurimos*'. (Östenberg 2009, 174–175; Scullard 1974, 111.)
[161] In the memory of Lucius Caecilius Metellus' victory in 250 BC the *gens Caecilia* took elephant as their family emblem and issued several coins portraying elephants. (Toynbee 1973, 35)
[162] Domitius was awarded a triumph in Rome the following year, but he did not have elephants in it.

Perseus. Östenberg suggests that Scipo and Paullus opting to show tusks rather than living elephants might indicate that elephants had already somewhat lost their novelty. Ivory tusks on the other hand, had not been displayed in a triumph prior to Scipio Asiaticus' event.[163]

During the imperial time both celebrating a triumph and owning elephants became an exclusive right of the imperial family.[164] Triumphs were celebrated less frequently during the imperial time, and elephants took part in them verily only three times:

Emperor Severus Alexander's triumph (AD 233)
Emperor Aurelian's triumph (AD 274)
Emperor Theodosius I's triumph (2nd half of the 4th century AD)

4.2.1. The role and purpose of elephants in republican victory processions

In the four first victory processions, where elephants were exhibited (Dentatus', Metellus', Marcellus' and Scipio's), they were portrayed as prisoners of war, which Florus' description of Dentatus' triumph shows well:

> *Sed nihil libentius populus Romanus aspexit quam illas, quas ita timuerat, cum turribus suis beluas, quae non sine sensu captivitatis summissis cervicibus victores equos sequebantur.*[165]
>
> But the Roman people beheld nothing with more pleasure than them [the elephants], which they had feared, when with their turrets the beasts, who were not without sense of captivity, necks bowed followed the victorious horses.

Florus' description is particularly interesting because he not only presents the elephants as prisoners, but he also claims that they understood that they had been vanquished and imprisoned. By describing the elephants' feelings and how they express them (*summissis cervicibus*), Florus indicates that elephants were seen as quite human like prisoners. To that indicates also the placing

[163] Diod. 31.8.12; Liv. 37.59.3; Östenberg 2009, 178; Beard 2007, 171.
[164] Juvenal (12.106–107) tells that the elephants were: "*Caesaris armentum, nulli servire paratum / privato*". The *Historia Augusta* (*Aurelian*. 5.6.) claims that when the future emperor Aurelian had gone as an envoy to the Persians, he was presented with an unusually large elephant, making him the only commoner to own an elephant during the imperial time. This, according to the *Historia Augusta*, was one of the omens predicting his future as emperor.
[165] Flor. *epit*. 1.13.28.

of the elephants with or close by the human prisoners in Marcellus' ovation and Scipio's triumph.[166]

Furthermore, Florus implies that Dentatus presented the elephants, four in number according to Eutropius[167], as they were seen on the battlefield: with turrets on their back. He had capture eight war elephants after the battle of Maleventum, so it is safe to assume that the elephants in the triumph had indeed fought against the Romans. The effect of the elephants must have been very powerful. The roman public had never before seen elephants, but they knew their reputation as terrifying war machines that had defeated the Roman army twice during the past five years. Undoubtedly, they were meant to terrify the spectators and evoke gratitude towards those who had defeated and subjugated them.

Three decades after Dentatus, Lucius Caecilius Metellus, too, presented elephants as captured enemies in his triumph. This time though, the significance of the elephants was not only due to their status as prisoners but to their multitude. According to Livy and Seneca Metellus had 120 elephants, Pliny argues he had 140 or 142 elephants[168] while Eutropius claims that the number of elephants was 130:

> *L. Caecilio Metello C. Furio Placido consulibus Metellus in Sicilia Afrorum ducem cum centum triginta elephantis et magnis copiis venientem superavit, viginti milia hostium cecidit, sex et viginti elephantos cepit, reliquos errantes per Numidas, quos in auxilium habebat, collegit et Romam deduxit ingenti pompa, cum CXXX elephantorum numerus omnia itinera compleret.* [169]
>
> When L. Caecilius Metellus and C. Furius Placidus were consuls, Metellus vanquished in Sicilia the African commander who had come there with 130 elephants and great forces. He killed 20 000 enemy soldiers, captured 26 elephants [during the battle], collected together the remaining scattered elephants with the Numidians, who he had in his auxiliary troops, and led them to Rome in a huge procession, filling all roads with 130 elephants.

Also Frontinus and Orosius maintain that 130 elephants took part in the battle of Panormus. Florus says that all of them were captures, Orosius says that 26 were killed and 104 were captured.[170] Therefore, unless Metellus had obtained from somewhere more elephants after the battle, of which we have no records, Pliny's statement of 140 or 142 elephants must be erroneous. Nevertheless, the number of elephants Metellus had in his triumph was formidable. It not only

[166] App. *Pun*. 66; Liv. 26.21.7–9; Östenberg 2009, 177; Shelton 2007, 126.
[167] Eutr. 2.14.5; Östenberg 2009, 174.
[168] Liv. *perioch*. 19; Plin. *nat*. 8.6.16; Sen. *dial*. 10.13.8.
[169] Eutr. 2.24.1.
[170] Front. *strat*. 2.5.4; Oros. 4.9.14–15.

ensured that his triumph was unforgettable but the transportation of so many elephants would have made his return to Rome a spectacle in itself.

Besides the number of elephants, Eutropius gives another interesting detail: he straight out states that the elephants Metellus led in his triumph were same Punic war elephants the Romans had fought against in the battle of Panormus. Since Dentatus' elephants had been of the Asian kind, this was the first time African elephants were seen in Rome.[171]

Four decades later, in 211 BC, when Marcus Claudius Marcellus celebrated an ovation he only had eight elephants in his procession. No record of Marcellus' ovation verifies the origin of the elephants, but Livy states that they were led in the procession as a sign of triumph over Carthage.[172] Earlier that same year Marcellus had led the Roman legions in the battle of Himera in Sicily against the forces commanded by the Carthaginian general Muttines. Livy declares that eight elephants were captured either during or after the battle and that it was Marcellus' last battle before he returned to Syracuse and from there to Rome.[173] Most likely the elephants led in the triumph were those that fought and were captured at Himera.

Marcellus requested a triumph but was granted an ovation, because his campaign had not concluded the war in Sicily. Unsatisfied with a mere ovation, Marcellus arranged, before his arrival in Rome, also a triumph on the Alban Mount. Unfortunately, there are no records mentioning whether the elephants took part also in this procession.[174]

Elephants were seen for the last time as prisoners in a triumphal procession in 201 BC when Scipio Africanus presented in his triumph some[175] African elephants he had received as a part of the peace treaty with Carthage. From 200 BC onwards, the Romans occasionally used elephants in their own army, which made parading them as enemies and adducing their monstrosity counterproductive.[176] This change of position that the war elephants underwent in warfare, led to a big change also in their position in the victory processions. Animals that had previously been

[171] Pliny (*nat.* 8.6.16.) agrees that Metellus' elephants were captured in battle.
[172] Liv. 26.21.9.
[173] Liv. 25.41.7.
[174] Liv. 26.21.6; Östenberg 2009, 43; Plut. *Marc.* 22.1.
[175] The number of elephants in Scipio's triumph is unknown. After the battle of Zama, Carthage was forced to hand all their elephants over to the Romans. Zonaras (9.14) says that many of them were taken to Rome, rest were given to king Masinissa of Numidia.
[176] Östenberg 2009, 178

described as monsters (*beluae*) became the escorts of the triumphator in the late republic.

The firs occasion where elephants were used as the escorts of the triumphator and seen as symbol of Roman victory rather than enemies or symbols of the defeated nations, was in 121 BC. Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, who had fought a successful campaign against the Allobroges and their allies the Averni in Gallia Transalpina, celebrated his victory with an unofficial victory procession in wich he rode on an elephant's back escorted by his soldiers. The elephant in question must have been one of the elephants that the Romans had used in the battle of Vindalium. Because the elephants had been the decisive factor in ending the battle in a Roman victory, and the opposing side had had no elephant of their own, Ahenobarbus' mount was clearly a symbol of the victorious Romans.[177]

Pliny claims that Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, who tried to drive in his first triumph (c. 81–79 BC) in a chariot drawn not by four horses but by four elephants, was the first Roman to try and harness elephants to draw a chariot[178]:

> *Romae iuncti primum subiere currum Pompei Magni Africano triumpho, quod prius India victa triumphante Libero patre memoratur. Procilius negat potuisse Pompei triumpho iunctos egredi porta.*[179]
>
> In Rome [elephants] were for the first time harnessed to draw a chariot in the African triumph of Pompey the Great, like is told having been done long before when Father Liber triumphed on his victory over India. Procilius says that in Pompey's triumph the harnessed [elephants] were not able to march through the gate.

Even though Pompey celebrated this triumph for his victories in Africa, he had not fought any battles with or against war elephants during his campaign. After concluding his military activities, he had spent some time hunting lions and elephants, but it is more probable that the four elephants harnessed to his triumphal chariot were given to him as gifts, rather than captured from the wild by Pompey. Elephants newly captured from the wild would have needed much training before they could have been harnessed to draw a chariot.[180]

Pliny compares Pompey's idea of an elephant-chariot to the myth of the god Bacchus' (*Libero patre*) triumphal return from Indian, during which he was believed to have either rode on

[177] Flor. *epit*. 1.37.5; Oros. 5.13.2; Östenberg 2009, 281; Suet. *Nero*. 2.1.
[178] This was not the first time elephants were used as draught animals in antiquity. The earliest known record of elephants drawing chariots is a gold coin minted by Ptolemy I Stoter (323–283 BC). On the reverse of the coin Alexander the Great is shown guised as Zeus Ammon and standing in a chariot drawn by four Indian elephants. (Toynbee 1973, 39, 350 n.52)
[179] Plin. *nat*. 8.2.4.
[180] Leach 1986, 31; Vervaet 2014, 135.

the back of an elephant or in a chariot drawn by elephants. This connection with Bacchus implicates that the elephants were believed to be escorts fitting for a god, making thus the triumphator seem godlike – or would have, if Pompey had succeeded. Pliny says that according to the historian Procilius, Pompey's experiment with the elephant-quadriga ended rather embarrassingly, as the *porta triumphalis* turned out to be too narrow for four elephants walking side by side to pass through.

Some scholars have suggested that Pompey's ostensible error, would in fact have been his intended plan. For example, Havener deems it implausible that Pompey would not have known the width of the *porta triumphalis*. He believes that Pompey, who had angered the senate by forcing, with the aid of dictator Sulla, his request of triumph to be accepted, planned to leave the elephants at the gate, thus demonstrating to the senate his humbleness and willingness to cooperate.[181] Beard, on the other hand, believes that the incident was most likely an accident but offers still an alternative theory. She proposes that the purpose of the too wide elephant-quadriga could have been to symbolize the smallness of Rome compared to Pompey's greatness.[182]

It seems more probable that Pompey's failure to fit the elephants through *porta triumphalis* was an accident. According to Granius Licinianus, Pompey tried to fit the elephant-quadriga through the gate twice, which seems conflicting, if he wanted to give the impression that he left the elephants behind voluntarily.[183] Furthermore, Plutarch claims that when many showed displeasure at his wish to celebrate a triumph, Pompey was inclined to annoy them even more. The elephants could have been an intentional allusion to Alexander the Great – after all, according to Appian, Pompey was wearing a cape that was said having been Alexander's.[184] Pompey's failed attempt was the only time elephants were harnessed before a triumphal chariot during the republican time. During the imperial time, however, several emperors reportedly succeeded in driving an elephant-quadriga in a triumphal procession.[185]

In 46 BC, when Caesar celebrated his fourfold triumph, he used elephants as a different kind of escort. After the battle of Thapsus, Caesar had in his possession at least 64 elephants, most of

[181] Havener 2014, 170.
[182] Beard 2007, 17.
[183] Gran. Lic. 36.4:" *S*[*ed cum*] *ur<b>em ingrederet*[*ur, mi*]*n<o>re<m> fuisse ele*[*phantis quattuo*]*r ad currum iunc*[*tis*] *<portam>* [*triumph*]*ale*[*m*]*, quamqua<m> bis experirentur.*"
[184] App. *Mith*. 117; Plut. *Pomp*. 14.4.
[185] See chapter 4.2.2. The role and purpose of elephants in imperial victory processions.

which had been Juba's war elephants and fought in the battle, some were those Caesar had used to train his own troops with. Suetonius asserts that the elephants escorting Caesar in his triumph carried lamps or torches, and consequently it is more likely that they were not of those elephants that had been captured on the battlefield. Juba's war elephants were, according to Florus, only recently brought from the woods and had been trained for battle rather hastily, so they would hardly have been thought how to carry burning torches in their trunks.[186] Suetonius describes the role of Caesar's elephants as follows:

> *Gallici triumphi die Velabrum praetervehens paene curru excussus est axe diffracto ascenditque Capitolium ad lumina quadraginta elephantis dextra sinistraque lychnuchos gestantibus.*[187]
>
> On the day of the Gallic triumph, while driving by Velabrum [Caesar] was almost thrown out from his chariot by the breaking of its axel and ascended Capitolium [on foot] in the light of lamps carried by forty elephants on his right and left side.

Cassius Dio agrees that Caesar was escorted by elephants but according to him they carried torches rather than lamps (*lychnuchi*), and it did not take place on the day of the Gallic triumph, like Suetonius curiously claims, but after the African triumph, which was celebrated last. In Cassius Dio's account Caesar was escorted by elephants in the evening when he was returning home from the public dinner held after the African triumph.[188] A torchlit escort home was indeed a great honour that had occasionally been bestowed to prominent generals since the time of the First Punic War.[189] For example, Gaius Duillius, who was the first Roman general to celebrate a naval triumph (260 BC), used to return home from dinner with an escort of torch-carriers and flutists.[190]

For the most part Cassius Dio's version is deemed more credible by most scholars, because, as celebrating a triumph after dark was unheard of, Suetonius' version must entail that the elephants carried torches in daylight. However, carrying torches in broad daylight was not an

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[186] Caes. B*ell. Afr*. 27.1–2; Flor. *epit*. 2.13.67.
[187] Suet. *Iul*. 37.2.
[188] Cass. Dio 43.22.1.
Suetonius (*Iul*. 37.1, 38.2.) claims that the African triumph was not the last of Caesar's triumphs. According to him, Caesar triumphed also a fifth time, to celebrate his victory over Pompey's sons in Hispania, and that it was after this Hispanic triumph he held two public meals: " (…) *et post Hispaniensem uictoriam duo prandia.*" Suetonius does not mention a dinner being held after the African triumph, nor does he mention any elephants connected to the dinner after the Hispanic triumph. Furthermore, Suetonius' phrasing of '*duo prandia*' indicates to lunches rather than dinners held in evening. (OLD s.v. , 'prandium')
[189] Östenberg 2009, 180.
[190] Cic. *sen*. 13.44; Liv. *perioch*. 17. Little over a decade after Caesar's death, Lucius Cornelius, a friend of Octavian's, who had in 36 BC rescued three legions from a dangerous position in Sicily, commemorated this achievement by riding on an elephant every time he went to dine. (Scullard 1974, 200)

unprecedented practise in Rome. Their purpose was not only to illuminate but to serve as symbols of light. For example, when Pompey returned to Rome in 50 BC, he was welcomed and escorted through Italy by a multitude of people carrying lighted torches during daytime.[191] Elephants in turn, because of their habit of raising their trunks up towards the sky and sun, were believed to be worshippers and proteges of the god Sol and were thus themselves considered as symbols of light and victory over darkness.[192] Voisin notes that, if Suetonius' statement is considered from a practical perspective, it seems quite unpractical for Caesar and those who followed him to be flanked by 20 elephants on each side. With their enormous bulks the elephants would have mostly blocked Caesar from the view of the spectators.[193]

On the other hand, elephants were most commonly associated with Africa in Roman art and symbolism, both in the republican and imperial times. For example, the personification of Africa was often pictured wearing an elephant head-dress complete with ears, tusks and trunk, as is seen, for example, in the coins of Pompey (minted arguably 71 or 61 BC) and Quintus Metellus Scipio (minted c. 47–46 BC).[194] Thereby it would seem more logical that Caesar would have presented the elephants, which were of the African kind, in connection to his African triumph rather than in the Gallic triumph. Except for Dentatus' triumph all the republican victory processions where elephants were present, were held in celebration of victories over African nations. In Caesars triumph the elephants were not captured enemies but, by being in the service of the triumphator and expressing obedience, they could have represented Africa's submission to Roman rule.[195] Caesars African war had fundamentally been a civil war. As civil war triumphs were not tolerated, Caesar presented his victory over Scipio as victory over Juba and the Numidians, who had aided Scipio. As Caesars escorts the elephants could not have been considered as captured enemies, but their purpose could well have been to enhance that the triumph was over African, not Roman, opponents.

[191] Östenberg 2009, 180 n. 311; Plut. *Pomp*. 57.2–3.
[192] Toynbee 1973, 53–54. Because of their supposed longevity (clearly exaggerating, Aristotle (*hist. an*. 7.9.) tells that elephants are said by others to live around 200 years and by others even 300 years.), elephants had their place also in the symbolism of victory over death, afterlife and eternity.
Another minor connection between light and war elephants is mentioned by Varro (*ling*. 7.40.), who gives an alternative etymology to the phrase *bos luca*. He suggests that *luca* was derived from *lux*, which would refer to the glistening of the shields that adorned the turrets, which the elephants carried in battle.
[193] Voisin 1983, 32 n.1.
[194] RRC 402/1a–b (Pompey's aureus), 461/1 (Scipio's denarius); Toynbee 1973, 50–51.
[195] Voisin 1983, 32.

The connection between elephants and Africa, was indeed most prominent, but some attempts has been made to connect elephants also with Caesar's Gallic War. This argumentation is mainly based on Polyaenus' account of the elephant Caesar supposedly had with him in Britain and a denarius issued by Caesar, with the inscription CAESAR and an African elephant trampling on what has been interpreted to be a dragon, a serpent or a Gallic dragon-headed trumpet (*carnyx*) used in warfare, on the obverse side.[196] Unfortunately, the dating of this coin is not clear. Some scholars have dated it to 54 BC, which would fit conveniently with the theory of a Gallic connection, but the evidence of some coin-herds suggests a later dating of circa 49 BC. This has led to an interpretation suggesting that the imagery alludes to Caesar's victory over Pompey in the battle of Pharsalus (48 BC) and represents the triumph of good over evil.[197] Even if one would believe this reasoning and accept Polyaenus' statement over Caesar's, it does not give any real argument in favour of the elephants having been a part of Caesar's Gallic triumph – if Caesar had omitted the elephant-episode from his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, not wanting to call attention to it, it would be contradictory if he indicated to it in his triumph.

Fig. 4. Reverse of a denarius (RRC 443/1) showing the name CAESAR and an elephant walking to the right and trampling a dragon-like figure. (Wikimedia Commons)

Some scholars argue that Suetonius and Cassius Dio's accounts are not necessarily mutually exclusive and suggest that elephants could have been present in both the Gallic and African triumph, although it seems most unlikely.[198] Regardless of whether the elephants were a part of the Gallic of the African triumph, their main purpose was to be the escorts of the triumphator, magnifying his glory and expressing his victory.

[196] Östenberg 2009, 181; RRC 443/1.
[197] Morris 2007, 198; Scullard 1974, 194.
[198] Voisin 1983, 32 n.1.

4.2.2. The role and purpose of elephants in imperial victory processions

After the end of the republic, elephants were first seen in a triumphal procession in AD 233, when emperor Severus Alexander celebrated a triumph over the Sassanids. The *Historia Augusta*, which is the main source of evidence for all the imperial elephant triumphs, gives a greatly exaggerated description of Severus Alexander's victory and his return to Rome claiming among other things that during the battle at Nisibis (AD 231) the Sassanids would have had 700 turret-bearing elephants with archers on their back and that 200 of them were killed on battlefield and 30 were captured of which 18 was led in the triumph.[199] The number of elephants the *Historia Augusta* claims having been led in the triumph is more plausible. Later in the description of Severus Alexander's triumph it is told that four of the elephants drew the triumphal chariot, supposedly executing successfully Pompey's failed plan of a triumphal elephant quadriga. What is interesting is that seemingly the emperor did not ride in the elephant-drawn chariot but walked on foot or was carried by the populace in front of it.[200]

In AD 274, emperor Aurelian held a triumph over the Vandals, the Juthungi, the Goths, the Carpi and the Persians, and, according to the *Historia Augusta*, marched in the procession 20 elephants among other animals.[201] Zonaras claims that Aurelian's triumphal chariot, which was according to the *Historia Augusta* drawn by four stags, would have been drawn by elephants instead.[202]

In the second half of the fourth century AD, according to the panegyrist Pacatus Drepianus, elephants drew the triumphal chariot of emperor Theodosius I. Pacatus says that a Persian embassy had gifted the emperor with gems, silks and triumphal beasts to his chariot (*triumphalibus belluis in tua esseda*). Considering both the significance elephants had developed as symbols of victory and escorts of the triumphator in Rome and their status as a royal privilege in Persia, these triumphal beasts were most likely elephants.[203]

[199] Scullard 1974, 201; Hist. Aug. *Alex*. 56.3.
[200] Hist. Aug. *Alex*. 57.4.
[201] Hist. Aug. *Aurelian*. 33.4.
[202] Zon. 12.27.
[203] Bardill 1999, 689–690; Pacat. *Paneg*. 2.22.5.

From the brief accounts of these few imperial triumphs, the first thing to be noted is that whereas during the republican time elephants were primarily connected with triumphs over African nations, during the imperial time they were mainly associated with triumphs over the Persians. This does not mean that elephant ceased to be symbol of Africa during the imperial time. The reason is that, during the imperial time elephant battles were fought against the Persians. A chariot drawn by elephants was held in a very high regard, possibly even the sole right of a king in India and Persia, and in the imperial Rome it became an honour associated with the Roman emperors and the worship of the living emperor, as well as symbol of grandiose and stately opulence.[204] According to the *Historia Augusta*, statues with elephants were decreed, in honour of their victories, for example, to the emperors Pupienus, Balbinus and Gordian III.[205]

In addition to the elephant chariots driven in triumphal processions[206], elephant quadrigas and bigas, especially when pictures on top of a triumphal arch, became a frequent pictorial motif in victory-related coinage. Some of the arches with elephant-chariots on top that are pictured in Roman coins might have represented real monuments. For example, the gilded triumphal arch of Theodosius I, erected in Constantinople to celebrate Theodosius' victory over Magnus Maximus in AD 388[207], was surmounted by a sculptural representation of the emperor in a chariot drawn by four elephants that were given to him by Shapur III.[208]

Martial says that emperor Domitian erected a triumphal arch, which had two elephant-drawn chariots with a golden statue of the emperor in both of them.[209] The elephant chariots, as well as the golden statues, no doubt were intended to express the status of *Dominus et Deus* that Domitian had assumed to himself. Elephants were after all associated with drawing the chariots of gods and goddesses. For example, Venus Pompeiana is pictured riding an elephant quadriga in a wall painting in Pompeii, Juppiter is pictured in a chariot drawn by two elephants in a coin of one Caecilius Metellus (minted 125 BC)[210] and Bacchus, according to a myth, rode either on the back of an elephant or in a chariot drawn by elephants when he returned from India. Elephants were

[204] Arr. *Ind*. 17.1; Harden 2013, 182; Strab. 15.1.41.
[205] Hist. Aug. *Maximin*. 26.5.
[206] The voting of a triumphal chariot became one of the substitute-honours for a proper triumphal procession during the imperial time. (Lange 2016, 21)
[207] For further discussion of the dating of the arch and whether it should be assigned to Theodosius I or Theodosius II, see Bardill 1999.
[208] Bardill 1999, 671.
[209] Mart. 8.65.8–10.
[210] RRC 269/1.

associated also with the imperial *Divi*, whose pictures were paraded on elephant-drawn chariots in the *pompa circensis* from the first century AD. This meant that elephants were connected not only with earthly victories but with victory over death.[211]

4.2.2.1. Some uncertain cases

According to the *Historia Augusta,* emperor Gordian III had among other exotic animals 32 elephants in Rome ready to be presented in a Persian triumph in mid-third century AD. Unfortunately, Gordian died untimely and the Persian triumph was never held. His successor Philip I chose to slaughter all the animals destined for the triumph in the secular games in AD 248. It seems that Gordian intended to present the elephants just as exotic animals among the other species in his triumph.[212] Earlier on in the *Historia Augusta,* it is told that the senate had decreed, as a tribute, chariots drawn by four elephants to Gordian for his Persian triumph.[213]

Emperor Gallien celebrated in AD 262, after defeating Postumus, a triumphal *decennalia*, which, according to the *Historia Augusta*, had many features of a triumphal procession: The emperor, dressed in the triumphal *toga picta*, ascended to the Capitoline accompanied by a procession formed by the senators and the equestrian order, the soldiers dressed all in white and all the Roman people. Among other things the standards of all the legions, some Persians that were supposed to be captives and men who were dressed to represent foreign nations, were presented in the procession, along with 100 white oxen, 200 white lambs and ten elephants, which had been in Rome at that time.[214]

In the so-called *Chronographus Anni CCCLIIII* 13 elephants are mentioned having been led to Rome during the reign of emperors Diocletian and Maximian:

> *Diocletianus et Maximianus:* (…) *Regem Persarum cum omnibus gentibus et tunicas eorum ex margaritis nimero XXXII circa templa domini posuerunt. Elephantes XIII, agitatores VI, equos CCL in urbem adduxerunt.*[215]
>
> Diocletian and Maximian: The Persian king with all his kin [they had brought to Rome] and their tunics of pearls, 32 in number, they had placed around the lord's temples. 13 elephants, 6 drivers and 250 horses they had led to the city.

[211] Östenberg 2009, 182–183; Toynbee 1973, 42–43.
[212] Hist. Aug. *Gord*. 33.1–2.
[213] Hist. Aug. *Gord*. 27.9.
[214] Hist. Aug. *Gall*. 7.4–8.7. Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 33.15) says that Gallien organized "*ludos ac festa triumphorum*".
[215] Chron. anni CCCLIIII, 27–28.

Some scholars have interpreted this to mean that the elephants took part in a triumphal procession. Two suggestions for the occasion has been made. For instance, Charles regards that emperor Diocletian celebrating a Persian triumph with his *caesar* Galerius after they had fought a successful campaign against Narseus in AD 296–299.[216] No surviving literary sources mention elephants during the Persian campaign, but in the decorative reliefs of the Arch of Galerius that represent scenes from the Persian campaign and some triumphal images, elephants are pictured in three occasions: 1) four elephants are pictured pulling an *armamaxa*[217], in a scene representing victory over the East, 2) an unidentified female deity or personification is pictured driving an elephant quadriga in a battle scene, 3) and in a scene representing a procession of gift-bringing Persians, four elephants are driven in the procession by their mahouts.[218] These images seem to verify that Persian elephants were indeed brought to Rome but do not confirm that they were led in an actual triumphal procession. Also, whether the Arch of Galerius was in fact a proper triumphal arc or rather a monumental gate of Galerius' palace complex, decorated with triumphal imagery, is still debated.[219]

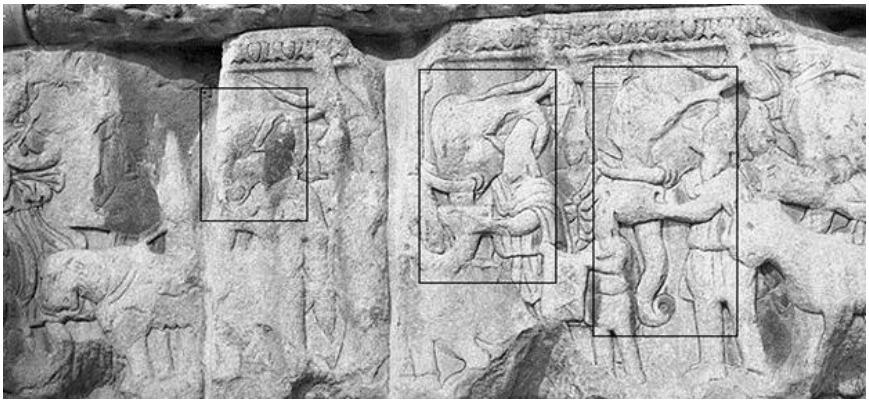

Fig. 6. Elephants driven by their mahouts in a procession of gift-bringing Persians on the Arch of Galerius. (Wikimedia Commons)

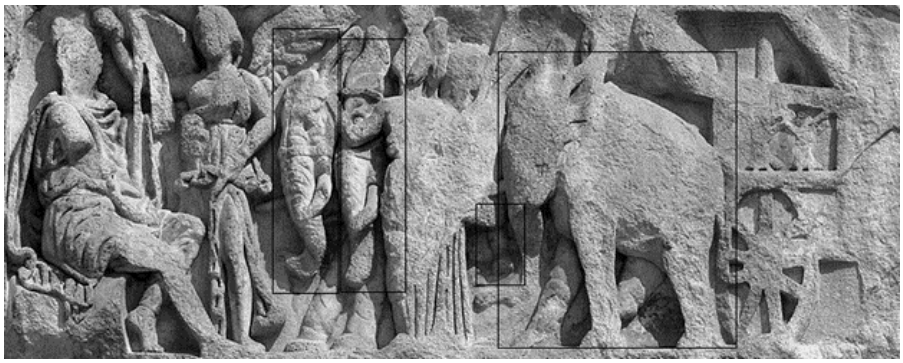

Fig. 7. Elephants pulling an *armamaxa* towards the emperor, who is crowned by Victoria on the Arch of Galerius. (Wikimedia Commons)

[216] Charles 2007, 310.
[217] Pond Rothman identifies the wagon as a *carpentum* but, as Östenberg points out, *carpenta* were mostly associated with Gallic triumphs. Therefore *armamaxa,* a Persians covered wagon, seems a more probable identification here. (Östenberg 2009, 32; Pond Rothman 1977, 445)
[218] Pond Rothman 1977, 436, 442, 445.
[219] Leadbetter 2011, 233.

An alternative interpretation is that the elephants would have been a part of the triumph Diocletian celebrated with Maximian in connection with his *vicennalia* celebration in AD 303. Eutropius claims that the wives, sisters and children of king Narseus were led in this magnificent triumph over several nations, but he makes no mention of elephants.[220] If the 13 elephants mentioned in the *Chronographus* indeed took part in a triumphal procession, whether it was Diocletian and Galerius' or Diocletian and Maximian's, the elephants were likely presented just as exotic animals to connect the triumph with Persia.

4.3. Elephants in other spectacles related to celebrating victory

Along with big felines and bears, elephants are the most frequently referred to and depicted animals in ancient literature and art. This has most likely more to do with elephants' visual power, the diversity of ways elephant could be used as entertainment and the Romans' fascination of these enormous beasts, than the frequency of their appearance. Elephants drew so much attention that Pliny tells that Marcus Terentius Varro dated an occurrence concerning selling spelt to the year when "*L. Metellus in triumpho plurimos duxit elephantos*".[221]

The first time elephants were presented in the Roman circus and the first time they took part in *ludi* connected to victory celebration, was in a *venatio* Lucius Caecilius Metellus held after his triumph in 250 BC. Overall elephants were presented in at least four spectacles that can be identified with celebrating military victories either directly or by fulfilling a wartime *votum* given in hope of victory:

in the *venatio* of Lucius Caecilius Metellus (250 BC)
in the *damnatio ad bestias* organised by Lucius Aemilius Paullus (167 or 168 BC)
in the *venatio* of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (55 BC)
in the *venatio* of Gaius Julius Caesar (46 BC)

[220] Eutr. 9.27.2.
[221] Dodge 2011, 51; Plin. *nat*. 18.4.17.

Pliny cites two versions of the elephants' role in Metellus' *venatio*:

> *Verrius eos pugnasse in circo interfectosque iaculis tradit, paenuria consilii, quoniam neque ali placuisset neque donari regibus; L. Piso inductos dumtaxat in circum atque, ut contemptus eorum increscerat, ab operariis hastas praepilatas habentibus per circum totum actos. nec quid deinde iis factum sit auctores explicant qui non putant interfectos.*[222]
>
> Verrius tells that they [elephants] fought in the circus and were killed with javelins in want of a better plan, since the Romans were neither willing to feed them nor to donate them to ally kings; L. Piso says only that they were led into the circus and, to increase contempt towards them, by workers who had ball-tipped javelins, led all around the arena. But what thereafter were done to them the authors, who do not believe them having been killed, do not reveal.

Verrius' version seems more liable, because, as Pliny notes, Piso does not give any explanation as to what happened to the elephants after the spectacle. There would be no sense in killing the elephant quietly outside the arena, if it could be done as a part of the entertainment. These elephants had previously been presented as conquered enemies in Metellus' triumph, and therefore their killing would have been an excellent replacement to executing human prisoners, who could rather be sold as slaves.[223] Even more improbable is that the elephants would have been left alive, as maintaining them would have been vastly expensive. However, there is no reason why Verrius and Piso's accounts should necessarily be regarded as mutually exclusive: the elephants could have been driven around the arena with blunt spears before they were set to fight against *venatores* and killed with real weapons. In fact, harassing the elephants first could have been necessary in order to get the naturally tranquil animals to fight on the arena.

In 167 BC Lucius Aemilius Paullus organized the first known Roman public execution by animals (*damnatio ad bestias*)[224], by having the deserters of the battle of Pydna trampled to death by elephants:

> (…) *L. Paullus, Perse rege superato, eiusdem generis et culpae homines elephantis proterendos substrauit* (…)[225]
>
> L. Paullus, after vanquishing the Persian king, threw persons of the same nationality and sin to be trampled by elephants.

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[222] Plin. *nat*. 8.6.17. Later (*nat*. 8.7.19) Pliny relays a conflicting statement by Fenestella, professing that elephants fought on the arena for the first time in 99 BC:" Romae *pugnasse Fenestella tradit primum omnium in circo Claudi Pulchri aedilitate curuli M. Antonio A. Postumio coss. anno urbis DCLV* (…)".
[223] Shelton 2007, 121.
[224] Paullus also had elephants trample escaping enemies in the aftermath of the battle of Pydna: "*retro qui poterant nando repetentes terram in aliam foediorem pestem incidebant; elephanti enim ab rectoribus ad litus acti exeuntis obterebant elidebantque*." (Liv. 44.42.6)
[225] Val. Max. 2.7.14.

Where this *damnatio ad bestia* took place, is not known. Paullus organised a victory celebration at the Macedonian city of Amphipolis, before returning to Rome, where a triumph was awarded to him. Elephants had no part in his triumph, and furthermore, it was customary to keep deserters and punishing them separated from celebrating a triumph, which was meant for honouring the achievements of those who had taken part in the battling. In this light it is more likely that the execution by elephants was a part of the celebration held in Amphipolis.[226] The important thing regarding the elephants, regardless of where the *damnatio ad bestias* was arranged, is that they were not captured enemy elephants but had fought alongside the Romans in the battle of Pydna. The deserters condemned to this highly humiliating form of execution had all belonged to the auxiliary-troops.[227] In Paullus' function the elephants were executors of Roman justice and, especially if the *damnatio ad bestias* was indeed held in Amphipolis, the purpose of the spectacle must have been to serve as a warning of what will happen to those who betray Rome, not just to be entertainment.

In 55 BC, as a part of the inauguration of his theatre-temple complex, which he had built to be a lasting commemoration of his military achievements, Pompey the Great organised unprecedentedly glorious games. He might have attempted to establish these games as an annual celebration, his own *ludi victoriae Pompeianae.* Votive games were initially one-time events, but a few of them, such as the *ludi victoriae Sullanae* and the *ludi victoriae Caesaris*, got established as permanent annual events in the Roman calendar. Temelini suggests that gaining the approval of the senate, which Pompey would have needed to get his games established as an annual event, could have been what motivated him to add a building for the senate into the complex.[228]

[226] Edmondson 1999, 78–79; Futrell 2000, 28; Östenberg 2009, 145 n. 75.
[227] Seneca (*dial*. 10.13.6–7.), who describes how criminals were put to fight against elephants in the spectacle Pompey held in 55 BC, considers the fate of being trampled by elephants barely humane: "*Princeps ciuitatis et inter antiquos principes, ut fama tradidit, bonitatis eximiae memorabile putauit spectaculi genus nouo more perdere homines. Depugnant? Parum est. Lancinantur? Parum est: ingenti mole animalium exterantur! Satius erat ista in obliuionem ire, ne quis postea potens disceret inuideretque rei minime humanae.*"
[228] Kyle 1998, 38; Temelini 2006, 10–11. *Ludi victoriae Sullanae* were held from October 26th to November 1st, from 81 BC onwards, to commemorate Sulla's victory at the battle of the Colline Gate the previous year. (Scullard 1981, 196) *Ludi victoriae Caesaris* were initially celebrated September 26th 46 BC at the end of Caesar's triumph and thereafter held annually July 20–30th. (Scullard 1981, 167)

Pompey's games culminated to a *venatio* in which around twenty elephants fought against some Gaetulians who were armed with spears.[229] This was the second time Pompey tried to make a statement with elephants and the second time he failed in it. At first the audience was pleased with the entertainment and admired how one wounded elephant threw the shields he had snatched from his opponents into the air like a juggler and how one elephant was slain with a single blow to its head, but when the battle had become desperate to the elephants the spectators' attitude changed. Pliny insinuates that the audience's displeasure was due to both the anxiety caused by the frightened elephants' attempt to break through the fences that had been erected to surround the arena and the distress caused by the way the elephants implored for compassion.[230] Cicero emphasizes that the spectators were predominantly upset by the cruel treatment of the elephants. Cicero, who himself was in the audience, describes the incident in his letter to his friend Marcus Marius as follows:

> *Sed quae potest homini esse polito delectatio, cum aut homo imbecillus a valentissima bestia laniatur aut praeclara bestia venabulo transverberatur? Quae tamen, si videnda sunt, saepe vidisti; neque nos qui haec spectavimus quicquam novi vidimus. Extremus elephantorum dies fuit. In quo admiratio magna vulgi atque turbae, delectatio nulla exstitit; quin etiam misericordia quaedam consecuta est atque opinio eius modi, esse quandam illi beluae cum genere humano societatem*.[231]
>
> But what pleasure can it be to a civilized human, when either a weak human is torn into pieces by a most powerful beast or a glorious beast is impaled by a hunting-spear? These things nevertheless, if they are to be seen, you have seen often, and we who saw this have not seen anything new. The last day was the elephants'. That day a great admiration but no pleasure arose in the people and crowd; indeed, even a certain compassion was aroused and an opinion of the kind that a certain fellowship exists between those beasts and the human race.

Such compassion towards animal on the arena as Cicero and Pliny describe, was indeed very unusual to a Roman audience. The reason for this reaction was that, yet again, the elephants were seen having humanlike traits. According to Pliny, whose account is admittedly somewhat more dramatized than Cicero's, after the elephants had lost all hope of escaping, they implored the audience for their compassion in a fashion that was quite human-like and must have surprised the spectators.[232] Circa two centuries earlier, when elephants were, according to Pliny's quotation of

[229] 20 or 17 elephants according to Pliny (*nat.* 8.7.20), 18 according to Seneca (*dial.* 10.13.6). Beard 2007, 22, 25–28; Harden 2013, 187.
[230] Plin. *nat.* 8.7.21–22.
[231] Cic. *fam.* 7.1.3.
[232] Plin. *nat.* 8.7.21: "*Sed pompeiani amissa fugae spe misericordiam vulgi inenarrabili habitu quaerentes supplicavere quadam sese lamentatione conplorantes.*"

Verrius [233], essentially slaughtered during Metellus' *venatio* (250 BC), they did apparently not get any sympathy from the spectators. In the end, the audiences' sympathy did not save Pompey's elephants.

After his fourfold triumph in 46 BC Julius Caesar organized spectacular games in commemoration of his military achievements. Caesar likely believed that the negativity that Pompey's spectacle evoked, was due to the audience's feeling of being in danger, rather than to objecting the killing of elephants, as he too staged an elephant battle on the arena. He had solved the issue of the spectators' safety by giving instructions to dig water-filled trenches (*euripi*) around the arena.[234] Suetonius describes Caesars spectacle followingly:

> *Uenationes editae per dies quinque ac novissime pugna diuisa in duas acies, quingenis peditibus, elephantis uicenis, tricenis equitibus hinc et inde commissis. Nam quo laxius dimicaretur, sublatae metae inque earum locum bina castra exaduersum constituta erant*.[235]
>
> Animal spectacles were organized for five days, and last was a fight where, divided in two battle lines, 500 infantry soldiers, 20 elephants and 30 cavalrymen fought as combined forces on either side. To get a bigger space for the fighting, the pyramids were lifted away an in their place two military camps were built opposite each other.

No surviving evidence indicates that the spectators would have been displeased with Caesar's *venatio*. On the other hand, Caesar's *venatio* was clearly a staged battle not a random fight were weak men are mangled by mighty beasts or glorious beasts slaughtered with hunting-spears. It might have seemed to the audience like a more honourable way to slay animals that showed human traits – if they were indeed killed at all. It has been suggested by some scholars that by staging the battle with elephants Caesar did not only aim to please the public but at the same time experimented with elephants as weapons in preparation for the Parthian war he planned.

Supporting the presumption that the elephants were indeed not killed on the arena during Caesar's show, but were saved for later use, are Cicero and Cassius Dio's statements that after Caesar's death a force of Roman war elephants existed and defected from Marc Anthony's to Octavian's side.[236]

[233] Plin. *nat*. 8.6.17.
[234] Auguet 1994, 88; Plin. *nat*. 8.7.21.
[235] Suet. *Iul*. 39.3.
[236] Cass. Dio 45.13.4; Cic. *Phil*. 5.17.46; Toynbee 1973, 38.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this study I have discussed how the Romans countered and used war elephants in battle, what was the role of elephants in Roman victory celebrations and how the development of elephants' role in warfare influenced and corresponded with their role and symbolic meaning in the victory celebrations. From the study of ancient literary and pictorial evidence of elephants in war and victory the following conclusions have been made.

Elephants were quite an effective weapon against an enemy, who had no experience of them. Elephants' strange smell, sound and looks evoked panic not only among the enemy soldiers but among the cavalry horses making them bolt uncontrollably and thus rendering the cavalry useless, as happened when the Romans saw elephants for the first in battle against king Pyrrhus of Epirus in 280 BC. The war elephants' seemed at first nigh invincible beasts, and thus it can be said that, when one Roman legionnaire was able to cut off the trunk of one of the elephants with his sword causing it to bolt and uncontrollably rush back against its own troop, it had a fundamental significance in the development of Roman anti-elephant warfare. It demonstrated that the beasts were in fact not invincible but on the contrary quite intolerant of pain.

When encountering Pyrrhus' elephants again the next year (279 BC), the Romans had prepared special anti-elephant waggons. The waggons had a wide range of weaponry fitted to them, from iron-spiked beams to soldiers shooting missiles and throwing caltrops, but still they proved ineffective because of their impracticability in battle. When facing Pyrrhus' elephants for the third time the Romans tried to exploit elephants' well-known fear of squealing pigs by letting panicked pigs loose against them. At both battles also fire-missiles were used against the elephants. These early means did not preserve in general use in anti-elephant warfare. After the Pyrrhic war there are no mentions of any anti-elephant waggons being used, other than Vegetius' theoretical description of *carroballistae* designed to be used against elephants. Neither are there any claims of pigs set against elephants despite Aelian's claim that the pigs had successfully countered the elephants at Asculum. Also the use of fire, despite the descriptions of its use against elephants being positive, is mentioned after the Pyrrhic war only at Capua (211 BC), Amida (AD 359) and highly debatably at Cannae (216 BC).

The weapons ancient sources most often mention having been used against war elephants are bows, slings and javelins. They are mentioned being used against elephants consistently after the battle of Heraclea, indicating that they were the most effective weapons, in respect of reliability and convenience, to counter enemy war elephants. The use of short-distance weapons, like the Roman short sword *gladius*, against elephants is mentioned almost exclusively in descriptions of deeds of exceptional bravery by individual soldiers. Albeit short-distance weapons were undoubtedly used many times as a last resort, it was realized from the beginning that they were not ideal weapons against elephants because they forced their wielder to close proximity with the elephants' trunk, tusks, trampling feet and the archers on their back.

The study of ancient accounts shows that the customary way of using long-distance weapons and missiles against war elephants was to shoot them in volleys against the elephants in order to cause the elephants as much pain as possible, rather than to aim to any specific spots. When fire-missiles were used, though, ancient accounts indicate that they were concentrated at the turrets war elephants carried on their back setting them on fire. Besides causing pain another possible way of using missiles against war elephants was as terror weapons. The writer of the *Commentarii de Bello Africo* says that at the battle of Thapsus (46 BC) Metellus Scipio's war elephants were frightened of the whistling or shrieking sound made by the slings. This is a very unusual claim, as elephants are in no other instance told having been frightened by the sound of slings or other kind of missiles, although they were on occasions frightened by other sounds such as blaring trumpets or horns.

One possible explanation to this could be that special kind of sling bullets were used at Thapsus to frighten the elephants, possibly similar to the whistling sling bullets that has been found from a Roman military camp and possible battle site at Burnswark Hill. These special bullets have a hole drilled in them which caused them to make a shrill, whistle-like sound when they flew. The bullets of Burnswark Hill date only to the second century AD, but ceramic sling bullets with holes that date to the second and third centuries BC has been found at battle sites in Greece, indicating that the concept was invented already before the battle of Thapsus. Julius Caesar is described having made many preparations against Scipio's elephants, including bringing living elephants from Italy so that his troops might get used to them and practice fighting them, wich gives support to the hypothesis that he might have instructed special ammunition to be made. After all, sling bullets were quite easy to manufacture, and when needed the Roman legions were

able to produce them themselves. However, further research should be done to reach any certainty in this matter.

It can be inferred that Roman anti-elephant warfare was based, not only at the beginning but till the fourth century AD, ultimately on causing the war elephants as much pain and terror as possible so that they would flee from the battle. The Romans killed enemy elephants if possible, but it was not a distinct aim in fighting against war elephants. More often than dying from the missiles shot at them, elephants are described turning against their own troops. This was in fact an excellent tactic as the turning elephants in most cases caused their own side great losses and disorder. In addition, if the elephants were not killed they could be captured after the battle.

Later more tactical strategies were devised against war elephants by some Roman commanders: at Panormus the Roman commander Lucius Caecilius Metellus constructed a huge trench as a trap for Xanthippus' elephants; during both the First and Second Punic War the Romans at times avoided pitched battles on level ground in order to prevent the Carthaginians from using their war elephant properly; and at Zama Scipio Africanus most illustriously arranges his troops in lanes instead of the usual checkerboard formation and had his light-armed troops coaxing the Punic war elephants harmlessly through his lines into a trap.

Light-armed troops had a major role in elephant warfare. They were both the usual type of troops to be set against enemy elephants and the troops that were placed among or close by friendly elephants to protect them from the enemy. Equipped only with minimal armour they were fast and agile enough to avoid elephants' trampling feet. Vegetius also mentions heavily armoured *cataphracti* and *clibanarii* -troops being set against enemy war elephants, but the surviving ancient battle accounts do not give evidence of Romans using heavily armoured soldiers against war elephants. Instead Ammianus Marcellinus claims that the Persians used cataphracts to protect their own elephants from the Romans.

It is evident that war elephants were effective weapons only against enemies who were not used to them. The Romans fought verily 37 battles against war elephants (280 BC–AD 363) and lost only five of them, three of which was during the first four decades. When Romans' experience in elephant warfare grew, and they came to realize that effectively countered elephants were as dangerous to their own side as to their enemies, they started to regard elephants not as terrifying

monsters but attributed to the race of elephants the trait of untrustworthiness, a trait that was attributed also to the Carthaginians as a people.

In 200 BC the Romans tried to use elephants for the first time in their own forces. The Romans' use of war elephant, however, remained only small scale and occasional, for they had already discovered how easily backfiring weapon war elephants were. As has been evidenced in this study, this made the Romans' use of war elephants more cautious than their enemies': they used elephants mainly as a defensive and psychological weapon to frighten and scatter the enemy, rather than an offensive arm to lead the charge against the enemy. The Romans usually took their elephants into battle only after the two armies had clashed and the shooting of volleys of arrows and javelins against the elephants was impossible.

The golden age of elephant warfare in the Mediterranean world was during Rome's republican time. During the imperial time the only enemies to use elephants in battle against the Romans were the Sassanid Persians in the third and fourth centuries, almost three centuries after the Romans had last fought a proper elephant battle at Thapsus, during Caesar's African war. The study of the ancient sources shows that during this hiatus a slight regression occurred in Roman elephant warfare. The surviving sources are vague in describing how the Romans fought against the Sassanid elephants, indicating that the means they used were probably regressed into basics. More attention is given to describing the elephants' horribleness, which again was the main trait attributed to them.

The part of this study that concentrates on analysing elephants' part in Roman victory celebrations has yielded the following conclusions. Firstly, the first elephants seen in a Roman triumph (Dentatus' triumph in 275 BC), as well as the first elephant seen on the arena (Metellus' *venatio* in 250 BC), were captured war elephants and the first exotic animals to be presented in a Roman victory procession. Therefore, elephants had an important role in the development of triumphal processions from a religious ceremony to an entertaining spectacle, where the main focus was in emphasising Rome's power, advertising the successfully fought military campaign and the achievements of the Roman soldiers and displaying the spoils of war and captured enemies.

Secondly, elephants' role in Roman victory processions was related to how they were experienced in warfare. It has been evidenced in this study that because elephants had usually fought either with the enemy, and had been captured on battlefield, or with the Romans, their

role in victory celebrations was more diverse than that of other animals. Other animals, with the exception of horses, had, virtually without exception, been taken as booty or been received as gifts from the defeated enemy and were presented in victory processions in a collective group as only exotic animals. Elephants were exhibited in groups of only their own species. When war elephants were feared enemies on battlefield, they were similarly presented to the people as defeated enemies and prisoners of war in the four first victory processions they took part in (Dentatus' in 275 BC, Metellus' in 250 BC, Marcellus' in 211 BC and Scipio Africanus' in 201 BC). Like the elephants fleeing from battle were attributed with the humanlike trait of unreliability, the elephants presented as prisoners in victory processions were described as quite humanlike prisoners: they were placed with or close by the human prisoners, they were dressed in armour as they had been in battle and, according to Florus, they were conscious of their defeat and imprisonment.

When the Romans had become experienced in elephant warfare and, most importantly, had employed war elephants themselves, the role of elephants underwent quite a significant change also in victory celebrations. Elephants were not presented as enemies and their horribleness was not emphasized anymore. After the Romans had had elephant on their own side, they became also the symbols for Roman victory and power, like in the *damnatio ad bestias* Lucius Aemilius Paullus organized in 167 BC. Similarly the change can be noted in other victory related spectacles: at the *venatio* Metellus held after his triumph in 250 BC the audience regarded the elephants with contempt, whereas at Pompey's *venatio* in 55 BC elephants evoked in the audiences deep sympathy, which was very unusual in Rome.

Instead of being presented as enemies, elephants gained a venerable role as the escorts of the triumphator in the late republican time (Pompey's triumph in c. 80 BC and Caesar's triumph in 46 BC). Evidently the purpose of an elephant escort was to emphasize the triumphators divinity, as elephants occur in several occasions as escorts of gods and goddesses. The beginning of the imperial time, when the right to a triumph became the exclusive right of the imperial family, strengthened elephants' position in this new role. Elephants' strong symbolic connection with Africa and victory over African nations, the main enemies to use war elephants against the Romans during the republican time, changed because the Sassanid Persians were the only ones to employ war elephants against the Romans during the imperial time. Elephants became associated symbolically also with the East and victory over Persia, where a chariot drawn by elephants was

held in a very high regard, possibly even the sole right of a king. However, when elephants' significance in warfare diminished during the imperial time and the Romans saw elephants more often in spectacles meant for entertainment than on battlefield, they are increasingly described having been presented in victory processions only as exotic animals, just to connect the celebration with the East.

The main focus of this study has been in analysing elephants in relation to military use and celebrating actual military victories, but it evidences also that in addition to their connection with victories in war elephants, because they were believed to be worshippers and proteges of Sol due to their habit of raising their trunks up towards the sun, were symbols of light and victory over darkness and, because of their association with the imperial *Divi*, symbols of victory over death.

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Appendix 1: Table of battles featuring elephants

Uncertain cases are presented on red.
The outcome of each battle for the Romans is given under the name of the battle: (V)= victory, (D)= defeat, (I)= indecisive.

	BATTLE OF	YEAR	NUMBER OF ELEPHANTS	SOURCES
ROMAN REPUBLIC				
PHYRRIC WAR	Heraclea (D)	280 BC	20 →With Pyrrhus	• Aur. Vict. *vir. ill.* 35.3. • Eutr. 2.11. • Flor. *epit.* 1.13.7–8. • Iust. 18.1.6. • Liv. *per.* 13. • Oros. 4.1.6–10. • Plut. *Pyrrh.* 17.3. • Zon. 8.3.
	Asculum (D)	279 BC	19 →With Pyrrhus	• Dion. Hal. *ant.* 20.1.4, 6–8, 20.2.4–6, 20.3.3–6. • Eutr. 2.13.4. • Flor. *epit.* 1.13.9–11. • Frontin. *strat.* 2.3.21. • Oros. 4.1.19–21. • Plut. *Pyrrh.* 21.5–7 • Zon. 8.5
	Maleventum (V)	275 BC	c. 19 →With Pyrrhus →Plut. some were captured; Zonar: some were killed, 8 captured; Dion: 2 killed, 8 captured.	• Dion. Hal. *ant.* 20.12.3 • Flor. *epit*. 1.13.11–13. • Oros. 4.2.4–5. • Plut. *Pyrrh*. 25.2–5. • Zon. 8.6.
FIRST PUNIC WAR	Agrigentum (V)	262 BC	30–60 (Oros: 30, Pol: 50, Diod:60) →With Carthaginians →Diod: 8 killed, 33 wounded; Oros: 11 captured.	• Diod. 23.8.1. • Oros. 4.7.5–6. • Pol. 1.19.1–2. • Zon. 8.10.
	Torus Hill (V)	262 BC	c. 50 →With Carthaginians →Most captured	• Pol. 1.19.9–11
	Adys (V)	255 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →18 captured	• Eutr. 2.21.3. • Pol. 1.30.7–14
	Bagradas (D)	255 BC	almost 100 →With Carthaginians	• Pol. 1.32.9, 33.6–34.9.

	Panormus (V)	c. 251 BC	140 →With Carthaginians →Pol: 10 captured with mahouts, others without, all captured eventually; Diod: 60 captured; Flor: about 100 captured; Oros: 26 killed, 104 captured.	• Diod. 23.21. • Flor. *epit*. 1.18.27–28. • Frontin. s*trat*. 2.5.4 • Oros. 4.9.14–15. • Pol. 1.40.6–15. • Zon. 8.14.
SECOND PUNIC WAR	Trebia (D)	218 BC	37 →With Carthaginians	• App. *Hann*. 2.7. • Enn. *ann*. 7.21. • Liv.21.55.2, 7, 10–11–56.1. • Pol. 3.72.7–9, 3.74.2,7. • Sil. *Pun*. 4.598–599. • Zon. 8.24.
	Cannae (D)	216 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians	• Sil. *Pun*. 9.570-619
	Casilinum (I) The battle was interrupted by nightfall	216 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians	• Liv. 23.18.6.
	Nola (V)	215 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →4 killed, 2 captured	• Liv. 23.46.2–4. • Plut. *Marc*. 12.2–3.
	Hibera (V)	215 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →Fled with the Moorish and Numidian cavalry before engaging in the battle	• Liv. 23.29.14.
	Iliturgi (V)	215 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →5 killed, 7 captured	• Liv. 23.49.5–12.
	Intibili (V)	215 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →9 captured	• Liv. 23.49.12–13.
	Munda (I) The Romans withdrew from the fighting prematurely after Gn. Scipio was injured	214 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →39 killed	• Liv. 24.42.1–3.
	Aurinx (V)	214 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →3 killed, 8 captured	• Liv. 24.42.5–8.
	Himera (V)	211 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians → 8 captured	• Liv. 25.41.7.
	Capua (V)	211 BC	33 →With Carthaginians	• Liv. 26.5.10–11, 6.1–2, 9–13.
	Numistro (I) The battle was interrupted by nightfall	210 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians	• Liv. 27.2.6–8.
	Canusium (V)	209 BC	Unknown (5 killed) →With Carthaginians	• Liv. 27.14.5–14. • Plut. *Marc*. 26.2–4.
	Baecula (V)	209 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians	• Liv. 27.18.18–20. • Pol. 10.39.7–8.

	Grumentum (V)	207 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians →4 killed, 2 captured	• Liv. 27.42.7.
	Metaurus river (V)	207 BC	10–15 (Pol: 10, App: 15) →With Carthaginians → Pol: 6 killed, 4 captured; Zon: killed by their mahouts	• App. *Hann*. 8.52 • Liv. 27.48.5–7, 12, 49.1–3. • Oros. 4.18.10–12. • Pol. 11.1.3, 7–12. • Zon. 9.9
	Ilipa (V)	206 BC	32 →With Carthaginians	• Liv. 28.14.5–7, 15.4–6. • Pol. 11.20.2, 22.2, 24.1.
	Insubria (V)	203 BC	Unknown →With Carthaginians	• Liv. 30.18.6–12, 15.
	Zama (V)	202 BC	80 →With Carthaginians →11 captured	• App. *Pun*. 7.40–41, 43 • Frontin. *strat.* 2.3.16 • Liv. 30.33.1, 3–4, 12–16, 30.35.3. • Oros. 4.19.3. • Pol. 15.9.6–10, 15.11.1, 15.12.1–5. • Zon. 9.14.
SECOND MACEDONIAN WAR	Athacus (I) The armies did not engage in fighting	200 BC	Unknown →First time with Romans, but did not partake in actual fighting	• Liv. 31.36.4.
	Cynoscephalae (V)	197 BC	Unknown →With Romans	• Liv. 33.8.3–4, 33.9.6–7. • Pol. 18.23.7, 18.25.4–7.
WAR AGAINST ANTIOCHUS III	Thermopylae (V)	191 BC	15 →With Antiochus	• App. *Syr*. 4.18. • Flor. *epit.* 1.24.16. • Liv. 36.18.4, 36.19.4–6.
	Magnesia (V)	190 BC	54 Indian elephants → With Antiochus →Liv: 16 African elephants with Romans left in reserve →15 captured with mahouts, some killed	• App. *Syr*. 6.31–32, 35–36. • Liv. 37.39.13, 37.40.1–4, 6, 14, 37.42.5, 37.43.9, 37.44.1.
GALATIAN WAR	Olympus Mons (V)	189 BC	Unknown →With Romans →Were left as a reserve	• Liv. 38.20.9–10.
THIRD MACEDONIAN WAR	Phalanna (V)	171 BC	Unknown →With Romans	• Liv. 42.65.12.
	Pydna (V)	168 BC	Unknown →With Romans	• Liv. 44.41.3–6, 44.42.6.
SECOND CELTIBERIAN WAR	Numantia (D)	153 BC	10 →With Romans →3 killed	• App. *Hisp*. 9.46.
THIRD PUNIC WAR	Nepheris (V)	147 BC	Unknown →With Romans	• App. *Pun*. 18.126
VIRIATHIC WAR	Itucca (I) The battle was interrupted by nightfall	142 BC	10 →With Romans	• App. *Hisp*. 12.67

NUMANTINE WAR	Numantia (V) Romans won the battle, but Viriathus was able to fend off the pursuing Romans	134/133 BC	12 →With Romans →Scipio was joined by Jugurtha with 12 elephants, but the elephants are not mentioned in battle.	• App. *Hisp*. 14.89
WAR WITH ALLOBROGES	Vindalium (V)	121 BC	Unknown →With Romans	• Flor. *epit*. 1.37.5. • Oros. 5.13.2.
JUGURTHINE WAR	Muthul river (V)	108 BC	44 →With Jugurtha →40 killed, 4 captured	• Sall. *Iug*. 53.2–4.
CAESARS 2ND INVASION OF BRITAIN	Crossing of Themes (V)	54 BC	1 →With Romans	• Polyaen. 8.23.5.
CAESAR'S CIVIL WAR	Thapsus (Caesar's V)	46 BC	60 →With the optimates →All captured	• Caes. *Bell. Afr*. 81, 83–84, 86. (Before the battle: 27, 30, 35, 41, 59, 72) • Cass. Dio 43.8.1–2. • Flor. *epit*. 2.13.67. • Oros. 6.16.3.
ROMAN EMPIRE				
CLAUDIUS' CONQUEST OF BRITAIN	Possibly Camulodunum (V)	AD 43	Unknown →With Romans	• Cass. Dio 60.21.1–4
SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS' INVASION		AD 193	Unknown →With emperor Didius Julianus	• Cass. Dio. 74.16.1–2. • Herodian. 2.11.9.
PERSIAN WARS	Nisibis (V)	AD 231	700 →With Persians →200 killed, 300 captured, 18 taken to Rome	• Hist. Aug. *Alex*. 55–56.
	Nisibis (V)	AD 337/338	Unknown →With Persians	• Theod. *hist. eccl*. 2.31.12–14.
	Nisibis (V)	AD 350	Unknown →With Persians	• Iul. *or*. 2.62-66.
	Amida (V)	AD 359	Unknown →With Persians	• Amm. 19.2.3, 19.7.6–7.
	Ctesiphon (V)	AD 363	Unknown →With Persians	• Amm. 24.6.8.
	Maranga (V)	AD 363	Unknown →With Persians	• Amm. 25.1.14–15.
	Samarra (I) The battle was interrupted by nightfall	AD 363, 26 June	Unknown →With Persians	• Amm. 25.3.4–5, 25.3.11.
	Samarra (V)	AD 363, 27 June	Unknown →With Persians →2 + a few killed	• Amm. 25.6.2–3.
	Sumere (V)	AD 363	Unknown →With Persians	• Zos. 3.30.2–3

Appendix 2: Table of Roman victory celebrations featuring elephants

Uncertain cases are presented on red.

	ORGANIZED BY	YEAR	ON ACCOUNT OF	NUMBER OF ELEPHANTS	THE ROLE OF THE ELEPHANTS	SOURCES
ROMAN REPUBLIC						
Triumph	Manius Curius Dentatus	275 BC	victory over Pyrrhus	4	Prisoners of war	• Eutr. 2.14.5. • Flor. *epit*. 1.13.26–28. • Plin. *nat*. 8.6.16. • Sen. *dial*. 10.13.3
Triumph	Lucius Caecilius Metellus	250 BC	victory over the Carthaginians	c. 120-142 (Zon: 120, Liv: 120, Sen: 120, Eutr: 130, Dion: 138, Plin: 140–142)	Prisoners of war	• Diod. 23.21. • Dion. Hal. *ant.* 2.66.4. • Eutr. 2.24.1. • Liv. *Per*. 19. • Plin. *nat*. 7.43.139. • Sen. *dial*. 10.13.8. • Zon. 8.14.
Venatio	Lucius Caecilius Metellus	250 BC	after his triumph over Carthage	c. 120-142	Prisoners of war	• Plin. *nat*. 8.6.16-17. • Sidon. *carm*. 2.373–376.
Ovation	Marcus Claudius Marcellus	211 BC	victory over the Carthaginians	8	Prisoners of war	• Liv. 26.21.2–4, 6-9.
Triumph	Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus	201 BC	victory over the Carthaginians	unknown	Prisoners of war	• App. *Pun*. 9.66.
Damnatio ad bestias	Lucius Aemilius Paullus	167 BC	victory over Perseus	unknown	Executioners	• Val. Max. 2.7.14.
Unofficial victory procession in Gaul	Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus	121 BC	victory over Allobroges and Averni	1	As a mount	• Suet. *Nero*. 2.1.
Triumph	Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus	c. 80 BC	African triumph	4	In a quadriga	• Gran. Lic. 36.2–4. • Plin. *nat*. 8.2.4. • Plut. *Pomp*. 14.4.
Venatio	Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus	55 BC	at the dedication of Pompey's theatre and the temple of Venus Victrix	c. 20 (Sen: 18, Plin: 20 or 17)	Animals to be killed in a fight against criminals	• Cass. Dio 39.38.2–4. • Cic. *fam*. 7.1.3. • Plin. *nat*. 8.7.20-22. • Plut. *Pomp*. 52.4. • Sen *dial*. 10.13.6–7.

Triumph	Gaius Julius Caesar	46 BC	victories in Gaul, Egypt, Pontus and Africa	40	Escorters	• Cass. Dio 43.22.1. • Suet. *Iul*. 37.1–2.
Venatio	Gaius Julius Caesar	46 BC	after his triumph over Gaul, Egypt, Pontus and Africa	40	War elephants in a staged battle	• App. *civ*. 2.15.102. • Cass. Dio. 43.22.3–4. • Plin. *nat*. 8.7.21, 22. • Suet. *Iul*. 39.2–3. • Vell. 2.56.1–2.
ROMAN EMPIRE						
Triumph	Emperor Severus Alexander	AD 233	victory over the Persians	18	In a quadriga and as exotic animals	• Hist. Aug. *Alex*. 56.3, 57.4.
Triumph	Emperor Gordian III	Mid-3rd century AD	victory over the Persians (animals intended for a Persian triumph; but Philip presented and slew all of them at the secular games)	32	In a quadriga and as exotic animals	• Hist. Aug. *Gord*. 27.9.; 33.1–2.
Triumphal *decennalia*	Emperor Gallien	AD 262		10	as exotic animals	• Hist. Aug. *Gall*. 8.2–3.
Triumph	Emperor Aurelian	AD 274	victories over several nations including Persians	20	As exotic animals and possibly in a quadriga	• Hist. Aug. *Aurelian*. 33.4. • Zon. 12.27.
Triumph	Emperor Diocletian with *caesar* Galerius or emperor Maximian	AD 297 or AD 303	victories over several nations including Persians	13	as exotic animals	• Chron. anni CCCLIIII, 27–28.
Triumph	Emperor Theodosius I	Second half of the 4th century AD	unknown	Probably 2 or 4	Drawing the emperor's chariot	• Pacat. *Paneg*. 2.22.5